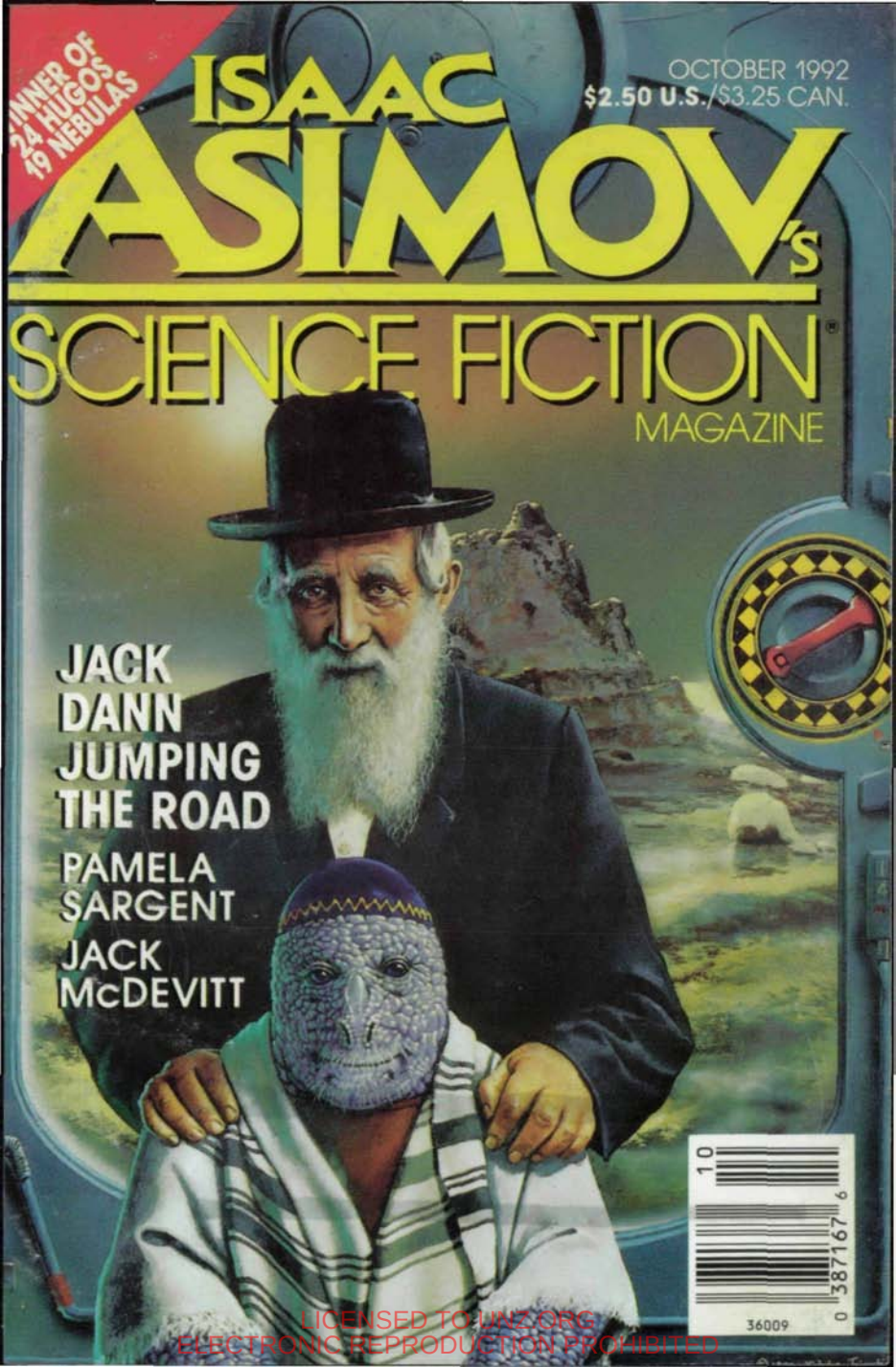

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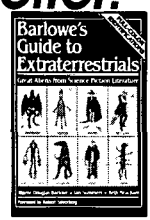

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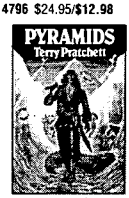

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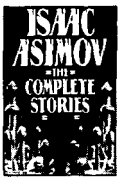

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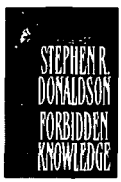

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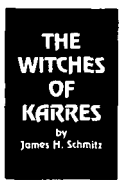

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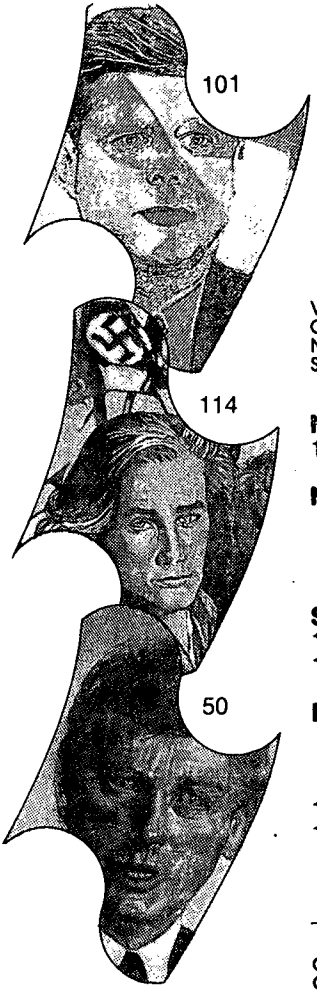

ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION® MAGAZINE

Vol. 16 No. 11 (Whole Number 191)
October 1992
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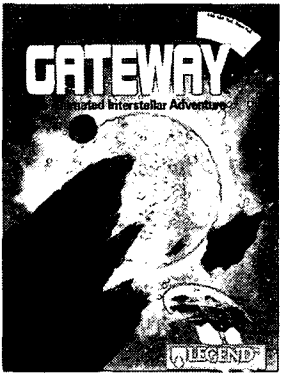

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GUEST EDITORIAL

by Connie Willis

THE WOMEN SF DOESN'T SEE

Connie Willis wrote this guest editorial for us while Isaac Asimov was ill, so that he could take a rest from the relentless pace of IAsfm*'s deadlines. Our next issue will be dedicated to Isaac. We have a number of moving memorials by his close friends and colleagues. Connie's own eloquent memorial will be a part of this special tribute to him.*

Ms. Willis's novella, "Jack" (October 1991); her novelette, "Miracle" (December 1991); and her short story, "In the Late Cretaceous" (Mid-December 1991), are all finalists for this year's Hugo awards. This is the first time one of our authors has had three stories from IAsfm *on the Hugo ballot, and it may be the first time anyone has ever had stories nominated simultaneously in each of the three short fiction categories. Congratulations, Connie.*

—the editors

The current version of women in science fiction before the 1960s (which I've heard several times lately) goes like this: There weren't any. Only men wrote science fiction because the field was completely closed to women. Then, in the late '60s and early '70s, a group of feminist writers led by Joanna Russ and Ursula LeGuin stormed the barricades, and women began writing (and sometimes even editing) science fiction. Before that, nada.

If there were any women in the field before that (which there weren't), they had to slink around using male pseudonyms and hoping they wouldn't get caught. And if they did write under their own names (which they didn't), it doesn't count anyway because they only wrote sweet little domestic stories. Babies. They wrote mostly stories about babies.

There's only one problem with this version of women in SF—it's not true.

I had this brought sharply home to me when I was looking up the stories I'd loved as a teenager. I'd never paid any attention to what the names of the stories were, let alone the authors, and, as a result, I found myself constantly saying, "There's this great story, I don't know what it was called or who wrote it, but it was about this town where they didn't have doctors . . ."

I finally got fed up with my own ignorance and went back to my hometown public library to look all these stories up in the rebound cop-

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ies of *Year's Best SF, Fifth Series,* etc., that I'd read them in in the first place.

When I did, I was surprised at how many of them were classics: Sturgeon's "And Now the News" and Damon Knight's "The Big Pat Boom" and Jerome Bixby's "It's a *Good* Life." And I was surprised at how many of them had been written by women: Kit Reed and Mildred Clingerman and Zenna Henderson and Shirley Jackson and Margaret St. Clair and Judith Merril (and that's not counting C.L. Moore, who I still didn't know was a woman, or Larry O'Donnell, which was one of the names she and Henry Kuttner used).

That's a lot of women, considering there supposedly weren't any, and I got to thinking maybe it was time we were reminded of them. Not because of their historical importance, but because they wrote great stories, stories I'd remembered all these years. So here they are, the Women Who Weren't There:

C. (Catherine) L. Moore wrote her first SF story, "Shambleau," in 1933, and it was an instant classic. She worked with various people and under various pseudonyms, but it seems to have been due as much to the demands of collaboration and pulp-writing as to discrimination. Two of her best stories, written with Henry Kuttner, are "Of Woman Born," about cyborgs, and "Vintage Season," which was published under the name of Larry O'Donnell, but everyone in SF has their own personal favorite. I just read "Vintage Season" again and was amazed at its freshness. This story, written in

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1946 about jet-setting time travelers who've come from a decadent future to watch our decline and fall, could have been published today. It's subtle, complex, and utterly unyielding.

Zenna Henderson is best known for the People, aliens-among-us who possess not advanced technology but the "simple gifts" of the spirit, but I like her school stories the best. She was a schoolteacher in Arizona for most of her life, and her stories of classrooms and substitute teachers and problem children have the unmistakable feel of first-hand experience.

My favorite is "The Last Step," about an unsympathetic teacher, and two little boys playing a game with toy cars and dirt roads and bridges made out of twigs at recess. She's got the way kids play down cold—the complex rules, the made-up words (I remembered "fairing-the-coorze" all these years, even though I didn't remember the name of the story), the deadly seriousness of it all, and when the teacher's foot comes down on it, it feels like—and is—the end of the world.

Shirley Jackson is world-famous for her horror novels, but even if she had never written anything but "The Lottery," she would have earned her place in SF history. My personal favorite, though, and the one I talked about for years without knowing who wrote it, is, "One Ordinary Day, with Peanuts." It's a very short story about a very nice man and a very crabby woman (you know these people—you've seen them far too often on buses and in line at the express checkout and yelling at the waiter in restaurants). I don't think this is just a story—I think she's hit on a universal truth. I mean, what possible reason could people have for such unrelieved crabbiness if they weren't being *paid?*

Margaret St. Clair wrote stories on the dark side, too. The best one, and the one an entire group of science fiction writers remembered when I mentioned it, is "Horrer Howce." Remember it? About the man selling Really Scary amusement park rides, like the one where you're in the car being chased by something with black tentacles that almost catches you, and the thing in the well?

She could also be very funny, as in "Prott," the story about the aliens who want to tell us their problems, and so could **Mildred Clingerman.** Her "Letters from Laura" is a new and hilarious take on the myth of the minotaur and the virgin, featuring a less-than-reliable narrator. I also love "Birds Can't Count," about the alien equivalent of birdwatchers, who know some very clever methods for getting us to forget they're there, so that they can watch us in our natural habitat, eating, fighting. Mating.

The person who published a lot of these stories was **Judith Merril,** who edited dozens of anthologies in the '50s and '60s, including the year's best collections I cut my teeth on. She also wrote (and continues to write) incisive and insightful stories such as "Exile from Space," about a child raised in space and encountering the earth for the first time as a teenager, and "That Only a Mother." Although

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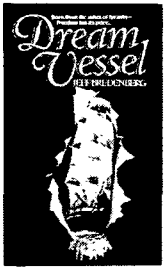

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"That Only" does have a baby in it, it hardly classifies as a domestic tale. It's a story about radiation, infanticide, and desperate self-delusion that manages to be poignant and horrific at the same time.

And finally, there's **Kit Reed,** who's written the ultimate rock star story, "The Food Farm," and "The Attack of the Giant Baby" and last year's "River." And the story that was singlehandedly responsible for my going back to the library.

I lied when I said I wanted to find out the names of stories and their authors—what I really wanted was to find one particular story, a story about a town that didn't have any doctors, a town where when the young girls were old enough to marry, they . . . the one that had scared me the most and stayed with me the longest, the one I remembered every detail of. Including the title. "The Wait" is a story a lot like Jackson's "The Lottery" in structure—the harmless-seeming surface and the feeling that things are not quite right, only this time the secret is not death but sex, and when the young girls are old enough to marry, they . . .

I have no perspective about "The Wait," no idea whether it's a good story or not. All I know is it scared the bejesus out of me when I was a young girl, and when I read it again, it was just as bad. I highly recommend it.

I haven't attempted to mention all the women writing SF in the '50s in this highly personal list. There was also Katherine MacLean, who wrote a great story about aliens and the dangers of measurement, "Pictures Don't Lie." And Leigh Brackett and Sonya Dorman ("When I Was Miss Dow") and Ann Warren Griffith and Evelyn Smith. And a host of others who wrote mostly novels or whom I've forgotten.

Shirley Jackson's and Mildred Clingerman's and Kit Reed's and Margaret St. Clair's stories (along with Damon Knight's and Jerome Bixby's and Theodore Sturgeon's) influenced me. But so did the writers themselves, even though I couldn't remember who wrote what. People are always asking me how *I* stormed the barricades, and my answer is always that I didn't know there *were* any barricades. It never occurred to me that SF was a man's field that had to be broken into. How could it be with all those women writers? How could it be when Judith Merril was the one editing all those *Year's Best SF*'s? I thought all I had to do was write good stories, and they'd let me in. And they did.

None of which has much of anything to do with anything except that revisionist history, however noble its goal, tends always to throw the baby out with the bathwater. And the baby in this case ("Those damned babies again! Can't women write about anything else?") is a set of smart, funny, skillful writers who wrote wonderful stories. And if these women didn't exist, then you probably didn't get a chance to read them.

Or maybe you're like me, and you've already read them but didn't know it. ●

See page 49 for Connie Willis's recommended reading list of Women SF Doesn't See.

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LETTERS

Shalom Dr. Asimov,

Don't you find "shalom" a lot nicer than saying "dear" to somebody you don't know?

I've intended to tell you something for a long time. During the Gulf War, at the end of January in fact, I received the Anniversary issue of your magazine. I was at this time (we all were) fairly hysterical, living in Tel Aviv and awaiting the Scuds. During the day I went to work (I am sixty-two years old and work as a secretary in a government office), at 3 P.M. I arrived home and from that minute on I put on my war uniform (a training suit) and sat down in front of the television to await the alarm and the Scuds.

I am sure you would like to know what I did when the siren sounded. We are three in our apartment, my husband, my mother-in-law of eighty-nine, and myself. We had a room prepared (first the vacant children's room and then our bedroom), we put on the masks, my husband sealed the room and I called first one daughter than the other: "Are you okay, how are the children? Did you hear anything?" Then we settled down to a nice and comfortable wait for the "booms" and the speculation whether they were Scud booms or Patriot booms.

During the whole time of the war (six weeks can be very long when you sleep dressed, with one eye open and both ears very much alert to the sound of the siren), I had not been able to read, but I tried to read that issue of *IAsfm*. And here comes the reason of this long story: It was wonderful, each and every story was interesting and fascinating, so much so, that I was so engrossed that I even forgot to be nervous (a nicer word for hysterical).

I hope you will forgive me for any mistakes or very poor English, but as you surely noticed, it is not my mother tongue.

Sincerely yours,
Yutta Pelzel
Tel Aviv
Israel

Dear Mr. Asimov,

I am a student at Bronx Science and I have just read the November 1991 issue of the magazine, *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*. Specifically, I read your Foundation story entitled "Forward the Foundation."

"Forward the Foundation" is an excellent story so far. I have long been a fan of the Foundation series, and I was happy to see that you are adding to the series. The series has been very interesting

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and I am curious as to what happened during the chronological gap between when *Prelude to Foundation* took place and when *Foundation* took place. I eagerly await the next part of "Forward the Foundation."

Respectfully,

Thomas Socci
Douglaston, NY

Dear Isaac,

A couple of years ago, my best friend loaned me a copy of *The Foundation Trilogy*. I was hooked! Since then, I've been reading anything labeled "**Isaac Asimov**" that I can put my hands on. I'm eighteen years old now and have appreciated your scientific essays as much as your SF stories. Being an avid reader of *IAsfm*, I look forward to reading your editorials and, of course, the stories too. In the last year or two, I particularly enjoyed John Kessel's "Buddha Nostril Bird," James Patrick Kelly's "Mr. Boy," Robert Silverberg's "Lion Time in Timbuctoo," and many more. . . .

One day, I would like to see some of my stories published too. As one of the best in the field, you have not only influenced my writings but have inspired me.

Stéphane Bastien
Orléans, Ont.
Canada

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I greatly enjoyed Norman Spinrad's November 1991 "On Books" column. However, I have one small question. What is the purpose of the plus sign that appears in the excerpts from Greg Bear's *Queen of Angels*? Does it serve as a footnote marker, or is it just there for decoration?

While I'm at it, I'd also like to congratulate you on publishing such an excellent magazine. For the most part, the stories and columns that appear in *IAsfm* are excellent. Keep up the good work.

Sincerely,

Eric Schwartz
Rockville, MD

Greg Bear responds:

"The plus (+) signifies one character's stream of consciousness —Richard Fettle's thought processes. Since he is the only character in the book who makes himself well again after undergoing psychological trauma, he deserves a special textual tip of the hat. When he actually goes to sleep and enters his own country of the mind the plus changes to a minus (−) indicating submergence."

Dear Dr. Asimov and Co.:

I absolutely loved Connie Willis's short story "In the Late Cretaceous" in the Mid-December issue. As a graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, I remember all too well the endless battles some of my friends had with Campus Parking (I myself did not keep a car on campus, since I was able to walk to all my classes). The Parking Authority of the college in her story must be run by the same people who run Campus Parking at UIUC.

Keep the good stories coming!

Karen S. Boyer
New Lenox, IL

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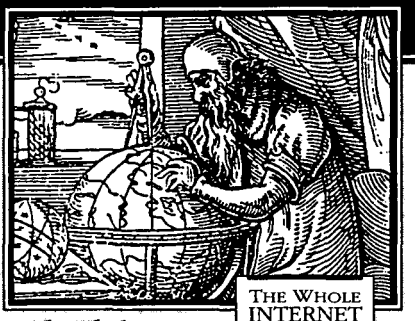

The Whole Internet User's Guide & Catalog
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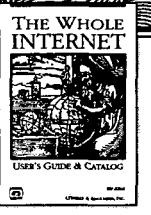
ISBN 1-56592-025-2
300 Pages (est.), $24.95



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Dear Dr. Asimov,

I think you gave in too easily! At the risk of appearing to defend you—you don't need it—I would like to reply to Tony Goss' letter in the January 1992 issue. He claims your story "Robot Visions" violates the First Law of Robotics, because the robot made no attempt to try to save mankind, even if it meant his own demise.

It seems to me that the laws of robotics operate within the bounds of logic, and that robots are eminently logical. The robot was only under the compulsion of trying to do something if—based upon logical deduction from the data available to him—he believed there was a chance of saving humanity. Since there was none, he was under no compulsion to try. One of the qualities of being human, I think, is the ability and privilege of attempting the logically impossible. Robots do not possess this quixotic quality, nor should they—they are creatures of logic, not feeling.

It seems to me that the robot did the only logical thing he could do, under the circumstances and within the bounds of the laws of robotics.

As for the humans—well, humans are basically emotional and irrational. They are capable of anything, including trying to kill off their mechanical progeny in a fit of pique.

Sincerely,

Charles Knouse
Athens, OH

Dear Isaac:

I must tell you how much I love Harry Turtledove's "In the Presence of Mine Enemies," in the January issue. I was very upset when I first started the story. As a born-again Christian, I have a deep respect for the Old Testament background of the Christian faith and of God's faithfulness to the Jew, who is still here in spite of centuries of discrimination and effort to annihilate the race. I couldn't believe *IAsfm* would print a story glorifying the Nazis.

However, as I read on, I was entranced by the turn the story took. I let my Jewish boss read the story and he loved it. He has shared his background with me; his ancestors moving from Spain to Turkey during the Inquisition, then to South America early in this century, as well as sharing an article in our local paper about how there is Jewish tradition buried in the Mexican culture. The story projected this type of survival in a very plausible setting.

I loved it. Thank you, Harry Turtledove.

Bette Drummond
Denver, CO

Dear Editor:

Reading my January 1992 issue of *IAsfm*. Here's my opinion.

Greg Egan, "Into Darkness": What a fascinating, fascinating concept! What an adventure it could be, where would the Intake take one? Where did it come from? Can it be stopped, or better yet, controlled? We may never know. We have the viewpoint of a Red Cross worker in a hurricane: "That's a mighty powerful wind, now I gotta help these people." Admirable, but somewhat boring.

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Harry Turtledove, "In the Presence of Mine Enemies": Doubletake; ah, the old doubletake. Nice, but is it worth digging through sixteen pages of readjusted, "gosh, this could of happened," history? No thanks.

Stephen Baxter, "Planck Zero": At last a story presented directly to the audience. No digging through chaff, trying to figure out what the storyline is. And so much! So much detail(?), so many things. The comp. personality; the protagonist's personal struggle with grief; domes on the moon; non-terrestrial lifeforms; overseeing, meddling superbeings; the awesome concept of life, and civilization, within a star! A great story! Well-written, fast-paced, and even poetry!

Molly Gloss, "Verano": I tried, I really did, but after line one, who cares? What are we selling here, Science Fiction or Personal Philosophy? Now there's a touchy question in publishing! I skimmed the rest of this pretty stuff, and yes there was an end to it.

Lawrence Watt-Evans, "Storm Trooper": Far out! This is a great story. A longer story would be nicer, but only if it's not loaded with fill. For what was done here, the length is great. I'm just greedy. I want more of this. Characterization? I believed, I knew that Fitzwater of Internal Security was prepared to kill Mitsopoulas. And what's better, I knew that Mitsopoulas knew it. It just synched together, and fit. And the last line, what a killer!

Michael Bishop, "The Balloon": Yeah, yeah, yeah. Was publishing this a respectful nod to Mr. Bishop or just promo for upcomings? What's the point of this story? Is it the moral that I ignored because I was so dazed from being slapped upside the head with it? Must have been. I still don't get it.

Steven Utley, "The Glowing Cloud": Pretty interesting but gosh, I'm sorry, I've got things to do. I read twelve pages and don't feel like digging through the rest to find out what happens. The protagonist seems very indecisive, maybe he learns that he can be decisive, I doubt it. The volcano sounds good, but what's happening in all those printed words? Is there not a commandment somewhere that proclaims: "Though shalt not retard the plot!?" In other words, too much fill. Not enough happening!

Well I guess that's it, in a fat nutshell. Two A's and a bunch of "Oh well's." Sigh. Thanks for listening!

Eric Hutt
Yakima, WA.

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AU

His great-great-grandfather had talked to gold,
alone so long they said he had gone mad,
muttering to California's hills,
washing sand and gravel from his beauties
with hands that had once bathed the son he'd lost
when, jealous of his trinkets, she'd gone East.
"I call these lovelies and they come to me,"
he told the dancehall girls when he noticed them;
"I put my hands on veins and feel the pulse
of mountains." He died a pauper; they say
he took his beauties with him to his grave,
so loath to put them in the hands of strangers
he chose to go right back into the earth
to spend eternity in their cold arms.

His grandfather said gold's a noble metal,
X-raying the ore body like a human's,
heap-leaching gold from rocks with cyanide,
respecting gold's reluctance to combine
with other things. He'd say, "To each his poison,"
his voice a whiskey rasp, raising his glass;
"you gotta hand it to an ore that only
drinks what would kill me," and one day did.

Now, summoned seven light-years from his home
by frustrated surveyors whose report
had mentioned sentience, he is spread flat,
listening to the rush of molten gold
like music in the veins of this new world,
deciphering its geologic tongue
with ears, with fingertips, because it shrank
from his equipment's crude magnetic field—
because he does not want to frighten it.
He feels it slither under him, around;
it circles like a mammal sniffing, like
a blind man tracing contours of a face,
a dance of heat and pressure, of direction:
he will learn. Already he has etched
a simple pattern on the stone beside him.
In his mind he sees the gold of bees,
imagines gilded whales in rocky depths,
spins down an aurum helix to his core.

—Terry McGarry

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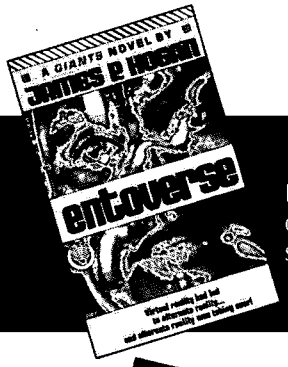
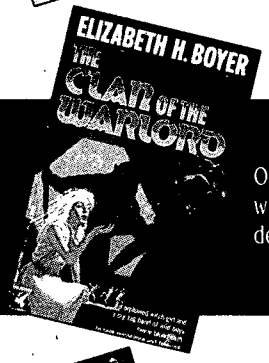
OCTOBER

A CONSCIOUS COMPUTER, AN ORPHAN CONJURER, AND AN ECOLOGICAL CRUSADER—FROM THE FIRST NAME IN IMAGINATION.



Humans on the planet Jevlen were changing—or being changed. The supercomputer JEVEX seemed to be responsible...and unstoppable!



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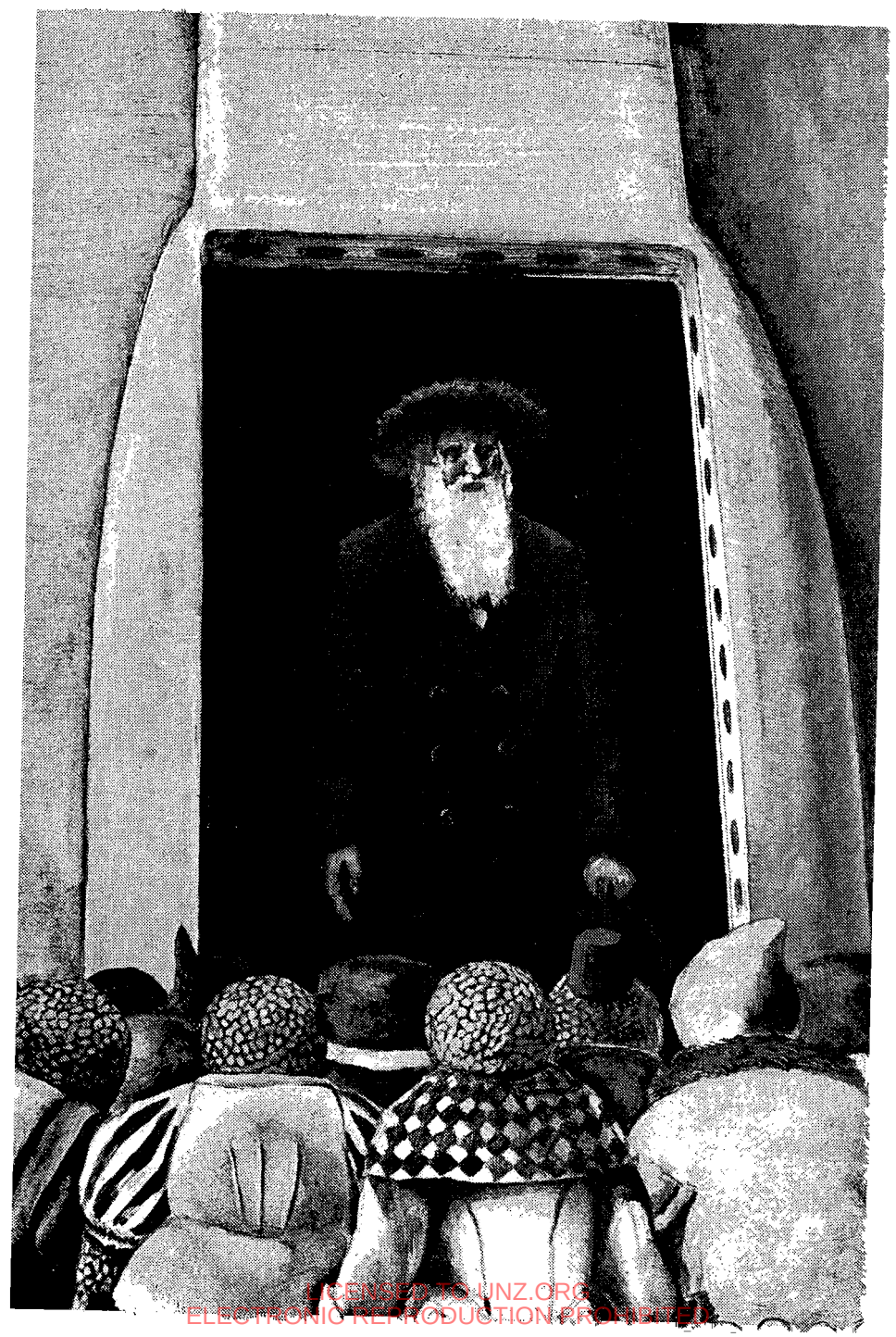

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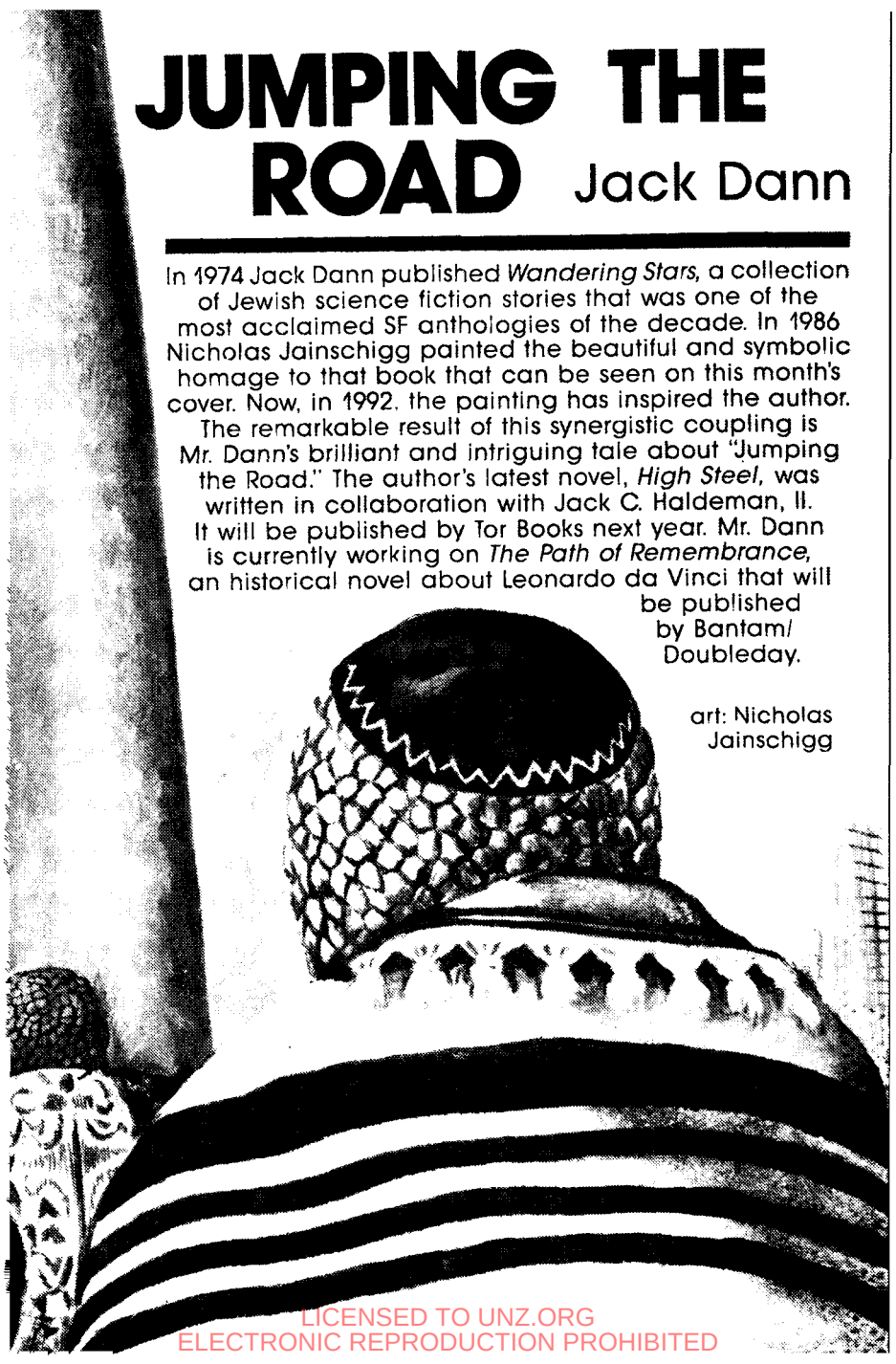
JUMPING THE ROAD

Jack Dann

In 1974 Jack Dann published *Wandering Stars*, a collection of Jewish science fiction stories that was one of the most acclaimed SF anthologies of the decade. In 1986 Nicholas Jainschigg painted the beautiful and symbolic homage to that book that can be seen on this month's cover. Now, in 1992, the painting has inspired the author. The remarkable result of this synergistic coupling is Mr. Dann's brilliant and intriguing tale about "Jumping the Road." The author's latest novel, *High Steel*, was written in collaboration with Jack C. Haldeman, II. It will be published by Tor Books next year. Mr. Dann is currently working on *The Path of Remembrance*, an historical novel about Leonardo da Vinci that will be published by Bantam/Doubleday.



art: Nicholas Jainschigg

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It really isn't right that I should give you my name. True enough that this is history, and history, if it is to be kept alive, must be recorded for posterity. But the name of Isaac ibn Chabib of Philadelphia need not be mentioned.

However, does not the *Pirkei Avos*, the *Ethics of the Fathers*, demand that we repeat a saying in the name of the one who said it?

I will admit to being Isaac ibn Chabib, fool, hypocrite, rabbi, and unregenerate disbeliever in miracles.

So for posterity, for all those who will listen, here is my story.

First of all, I should tell you that I didn't want to go to Tobias.

Tobias is not even the real name of the planet. The Jews who live there call it *Bharees*, or Covenant, because the remnants of one of its moons form a ring of dust and stones that appear as a gauzy rainbow in the night sky. It is, I will admit, a beautiful sight; and as if that's not enough, the comets rain across the heavens and sheets of aurorae shimmer like tinted crystal.

Everyone else calls the place *Ulim*, which means world. We named it Tobias, after Martin Tobias, President of the United States of Canada. But I'm getting away from the point. The point is that all Jews—*any* Jews on any planet—must trace their cultural heritage back to Earth. There can be only one Sinai, one Torah, one Adonoi.

If the Jews have scaly skin like alligators and yellow eyes and seven fingers on each hand, that's fine. Good for them; they're converts. The Torah doesn't discriminate. At some time, some adventurous Jews colonized Covenant and converted the natives. Or the natives listened in on our radio transmissions—not that Jews have so many programs on the air—and decided to become Jewish. (Which just goes to prove that you don't need to be human to be a masochist.) That's the only logical explanation why the Good Will Traders discovered Jews on Covenant.

That was my argument, but the xeno-historians and cultural anthropologists had written an *Encyclopedia Galactica* detailing that the "*Ulim* Jews" were as indigenous to the planet as the electric cats and the flimflams that soared in the sky like birds and burrowed into the earth like worms. It seemed that Judaism had actually, impossibly, evolved *independently* on a different planet. Oh, there were plenty of theories about how such a thing could happen, but they were as wild and esoteric as anything Leibniz or the Lurianic Kabbalists could have imagined: ghostly quantum worlds splitting into imperfect copies of themselves (not so different from the mystic's worlds of angels and demons), the Copenhagen collapse, mirror universes, splitting universes, the Everett Wheeler Graham metatheorem, the turbulent effects of chaos, the great fractal chain, and who knows what else.

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So now we are to believe in two Sinai's, two Torahs, and four Talmuds, for like us, the *Ulim* Jews had two versions of Talmud, which, in case you might not know, are chronicles of Jewish culture, law, and myth. They even spoke Hebrew . . . well, they spoke something like Hebrew.

Why didn't I want to go to Tobias—to Covenant, to *Ulim*, if you like? Why wouldn't I want to verify a miracle and renew my faith?

The truth?

I was afraid. I had come to terms with history. Faith could not supplant reason. The evidence was incontrovertible.

Had *been* incontrovertible. . . .

The shuttle landed in the country of *Chakk*, which had once been the Mesopotamia of this planet. Although it was in a northern latitude, it was quite temperate. The landing field was huge, for this was a major spaceport, but it was, in effect, a crater in the center of a coral green city of bole and root and leaf the size of New Boston. I waited in the airlock, alone, staring out the bolted plastocene door, as if I was a pariah; the crew and other passengers had debouched earlier. As this was my first visit, I had to wait in isolation. It seemed like days, but it was only hours. By exposing me to enough radiation to make me glow like a tropical fish, they would certainly make me kosher. I guess they didn't trust anyone's infection control procedures but their own. So what could be lost but a little time? I'm ninety-seven years old. I've got a slow metabolism. A little radiation won't kill me, and if it does, that wouldn't be such a loss.

The *Tzaddik*—the "Good Jew who makes miracles and talks with God," the grand rabbi, my boss—would just have to send someone younger and less cynical to discover the nature of God.

So I stood before the lock and stared out into the landing field. It would soon be time, for an alien stood on the field below and waited for me. He didn't wave, nor did he move around or shift his weight from foot to foot. He stood still as stone, his yellowish eyes fixed on me. He wore a blue yarmulke that fitted tightly to his bald, blue-gray head—the kind of yarmulkes handed out at Bar Mitzvahs on Long Island—and a black-striped prayer-shawl was draped over his shoulders. Suddenly a crowd of other Ulimites gathered before the shuttle, but they stayed well away from the one dressed as a Jew. Those that came too close to him moved away quickly with nervous grins on their faces. Except for the Jew, they all seemed agitated. The Ulimites were dressed in fine linens that billowed and ballooned, multi-hued gowns and coats and breeches that were meant to create new shapes rather than accentuate or improve nature. It reminded me of sixteenth-century English fashion, the kind of clothes worn during the reign of Henry VIII.

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A human delegation arrived, all in evening clothes; so I was to be formally received.

I would have preferred to go off quietly with the alien in the *tallis*.

Then the ship wished me farewell, the lock sighed open, and I walked down the enclosed gangway. The mossy smells of forest and grass, which were carried on gentle breezes, were overwhelming. I shook hands with the ambassador from the Canadian States and his officers from the foreign office, and was introduced to the alien ambassador and other dignitaries who extended their seven-fingered hands to greet me. Their skin was surprisingly hot, and leathery as the case of an old book. It took a moment to get used to looking at the aliens and listening to the translator, who was a young woman with a hard, shiny face and a deep voice.

Two men clutched my elbows as if I were a fugitive and gently propelled me toward what looked to be a slidewalk the size of a thoroughfare. They were going to ghost me away before the alien in the *tallis* could introduce himself. "Excuse me," I said to the man on my right (after all, I'm right-handed), "but what about my friend there?" I waved to the alien in the yarmulke, who stood alone away from the crowd. He frowned, which for an Ulimite is the same thing as a smile. (I had had the whole voyage in the starship to study, so I knew a *few* things.)

"Shalom," he said in a voice that carried over the noise of the others. The intonation was odd: he pronounced the word as if it were divided into three distinct syllables, and he glottalized the "al" and "om."

I asked him who he was: *"Mee Ahtaw?"*

He spoke quickly, as if the group surrounding me would stop him any second, but it was as if he didn't exist: his brethren either didn't notice him or were purposely ignoring him. Although he used words I had never heard, I understood most of what he said. His name was Tahlmeade, which meant student, at least in Terran Hebrew.

A member of the Ulimite delegation stepped right in front of me, even as I was speaking to Tahlmeade. I thought it very rude, and odd; but Tahlmeade simply moved around the periphery of the nervous crowd and re-established eye-contact with me. As he moved about, like a child playing peekaboo, I could not help but smile. All the Ulimites were short—about four and a half feet tall—and their flattened features, serious expressions, and roundish heads made them seem . . . cute. But even to think about them that way was condescending. No, more than that. Was it not just another form of prejudice? Of racism? Indeed, the human dignitaries might well think that an old man with a long beard and earlocks was *cute*, especially one wearing a fur-brimmed hat, and a black caftan with a silk cord knotted around his waist to separate the Godly parts—the mind, the soul, and the heart—from the lower parts.

And who knows what the Ulimites thought of *humans*? Most likely,

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they didn't perceive us as cute. Perhaps they considered us smelly, sweaty, brutelike, fleshy as mushrooms, and most likely crazy: *meshuggener*.

The uniformed young man beside me motioned to Tahlmeade. He was with the consulate mission and held onto my elbow as if I was on my last legs and about to fall face-flat on the ground. "Don't worry, Rabbi, he knows his way around. He'll catch up with us later."

"I should *hope* he knows his way around, but where are we going?"

"To the consulate. A party has been prepared in your honor." The young bureaucrat was quite handsome: dark hair, a good sharp nose that you could see, a strong chin, and dark eyes that would make women talk.

"Please, let's bring the alien in the prayer-shawl along with us. It's obvious that—"

"I'm afraid that would not do, Rabbi."

"Would not *do*?"

The young men pulled me along, and I, of course, did not resist; I just walked slowly—after all, I'm an old man.

"After the briefing, you'll understand."

"Ah, now it's a briefing!" and after a step or two, I asked, "So if Jews are not allowed at this party, what am *I* going to do there?"

"With all due respect, Rabbi, you're jumping to conclusions," said the ambassador, who walked beside us; he was tall and gray, and wore a thin mustache that was black as a pencil mark. Then he frowned at the aliens and smiled at me. The Ulimites frowned happily back at us, indicating that all was well with their world.

As I was whisked across the spaceport, I looked over my shoulder. But Tahlmeade and the ship had disappeared, replaced by an architectural chaos of brown and green. The city of Khârig, the largest and most fabulous city on Ulim, was a sculpted garden, and I was passing through it at a hundred miles an hour. Arches, stadiums, peristyle courts, statues as large as skyscrapers, castles, rotundas, pavilions, halls, lodges, offices, governmental complexes vaulted over razor-cut avenues; they grew out of the ground complete with flying buttresses, towers, domes, and cupolas; their architectural styles were as exotic as the Hagia Sophia or the Cetian monoliths. I imagined that I could see the façades of San Carlo, the Doric porticos of Hagley Park, the Romanesque and gothic pinnacles of the Milan Cathedral, and the glass skyscraper needles of van der Rohe. The Ulim had planted a city, had shaped trees and shrub and mirrored leaves into habitation: into civilization. I felt dizzy, overwhelmed, enraptured. I felt swallowed by the silvery green *alienness* of it all.

So this was culture shock.

If such a thing could turn an old man with earlocks into a poet, imagine what it might do to someone who still had some *juice* left inside him?

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* * *

The cocktail party was endless, the talk small, and although the ambassador took special pains to provide me with some ninety-proof Slivovitz whiskey (which he thought all Jews drank), I left all the *schnapps* alone; neither did I take any narcodrines or enhancers; neither did I attend any of the Virtual parties that were also being held in my honor. I am a simple man. I drink in private. I am too old for sex. (I could still perform, I suppose; but I've courted peace and privacy for far too long to give them up for a wife.) I like to read, go to bed early, eat like a glutton at the Tzaddik's court, argue pilpul and philosophy with the other rabbis, smoke the flat, foul-smelling cigarettes from Turkey, and wake up with the cock (not what you think!) to begin another—and perhaps final—day.

Yet I felt like the alien here, and not because I was carrying on conversations with creatures with yellow eyes and blue-gray skin the texture of alligators (albeit through my interpreter, who indicated that she would be willing to warm me up during the night, and then gave me a blank look when I told her that I was no Gandhi—she probably thought "Gandhi" was a Jewish perversion); no, I felt just now like the hypocrite I was. You see, Jewish guilt is indeed a fact. I was a fraud, and these people, both alien and human, thought they were talking to a real Chassid master rebbeh, a living anachronism, a mystic who believed in kabbalah and amulets, who had his own *derekh*, his own special channel to communicate with God, and who knew His secret name: the Tetragrammaton. Indeed, they thought they had found a human who would understand and could explain the mystery of the Jews of this planet. The "Jewish Mystery" seemed to be a major philosophical problem for the intelligentsia of Ulim, both human and alien. It was as if they had to go to secondary sources to find out about these Jews . . . as if it never occurred to anyone just to go and ask a blue-skinned Jew.

So they asked *me*, a human hypocrite who remained a Chassid and a rabbi only because that was all I knew. I was too old and frightened, too corrupt, to leave the *Tzaddik*'s court and die alone among strangers. I needed respect, and wasn't willing to give up my few servants and my small congregation. I could tell you that I lost my faith because of Auschwitz, but who remembers Auschwitz? Not my Tzaddik, who believed himself to be the *melits yoysher*, the one who pleads for the Jews who violate any one of the six hundred and thirteen positive and negative commandments, who believes that all *tsores*, all the troubles visited upon the Jews, are punishment for collective and individual sin. So six million Jews die because they sinned. . . .

Oh, I argued with the Tzaddik, I told him that only a madman could believe in prayer after the Holocaust. If there was a God, He was no longer in the world; He was not the God of history. He could not be

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propitiated. After all, what terrible crime had we committed? The Torah says, "for our sins we are punished," but who was punished, who was murdered? The poorest, the most faithful, the most pious. This, then, was the revelation, and the Holocaust was the modern Sinai—if one could call an event that happened two hundred years ago *modern*.

So what did my Tzaddik do? He told his three thousand followers that *I* had had a revelation, that God had revealed himself to me alone, that *I* was now a Tzaddik.

And *that's* why he sent me to Tobias instead of going himself.

I told the story of my Tzaddik to my hosts, and everyone frowned and shook my hand, until I actually almost began to feel like a Tzaddik who could do no wrong. I told them funny stories, and they especially liked Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav's story of the wise but skeptical man who had been sent a message from his king, but refused to open it because the messenger couldn't prove to the wise man that the king existed; nor could anyone else.

" 'Now do you see?' the skeptical wise man said to the messenger. 'People are foolish and naïve and believe what they wish. They live a lie because they fear the truth.' "

Everyone agreed with Rabbi Nachman, who probably would have gotten a kick out of knowing his story was being told by a poor Jew to goyim who lived in the heavens.

Against all my good judgment, I began to enjoy myself a little; and just when I was about to indulge in a finger of Slivovitz (even if it tastes like rubbing alcohol, why break tradition?), the ambassador's aide relieved me of my newfound admirers and took me down narrow, labyrinthine corridors to an inner sanctum for the threatened briefing. I have to say, though, that these people were poets; they knew a good metaphor when they saw one. Although the striated walls of this grand salon seemed to be made of wood, they looked like meat. Whether it was sap or water, I don't know; but the very walls seemed to be sweating.

And there were no windows in here. A perfect place for an interrogation.

"Well?" I asked the ambassador, who was sitting opposite me with his staff beside him. We sat at a conference table made of the same stuff as the walls, but I didn't touch the table or anything on it. There was a setting before me: blue monochrome Delft china, heavy silverware, and crystal; and within easy reach were sandwiches on painted porcelain plates, and liquor, juice, and wine in clear Bristol goblets. A pear-shaped silver coffee pot took up an entire corner of the table, which seemed to be sweating profusely under the feet of the pot. The slightly acrid aroma of coffee was delicious.

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"It's all kosher," he said, gesturing at the food and drink. "I noticed you neither ate nor drank at the party. Surely you must be hungry. . . ."

"Why all this fuss over a rabbi from Brooklyn who's not even published?"

"Because it seems that you're the key to the mystery."

"Ah, yes, the mystery of the Jews," I said. "Why are these blue people asking *me* to tell them about their own Jews."

"Ulimites," the ambassador said, correcting me; yet there was no condescension in his voice.

"Ulimites." Then after a beat, I said, "They had a Jew right at the shuttle port. Why didn't they ask *him*? And why wasn't he allowed to come along?"

"That's just the problem. They can't even *see* him. They have some kind of proprioceptive sense that he's there, but that's all."

"That's crazy!"

The ambassador shrugged. "The Ulimites can't see Jews. Why? We don't know. Yet they're absolutely obsessed with finding out all they can about the Jews."

"Well, they certainly seem to be able to see *me*," I said. "So either I'm not a Jew or—"

"They have no trouble seeing humans, whether they're Jewish or not," the ambassador said, humoring me. After all, what else could he do?

"So before you came to colonize—"

"Not to colonize, Rabbi. We do not colonize planets that—"

"Excuse me for my ignorance, Ambassador, but before you came here to visit—"

"—To establish diplomatic relations."

"—How could they be obsessed with finding out about Jews *before* you arrived, if they couldn't *see* Jews or ask anyone else who *could*?"

"It was like an itch they couldn't scratch," one of the aides said; the one with the handsome face and good nose.

The ambassador glanced at the aide, who reddened slightly, and then said to me, "They discovered various Jewish texts that had not been destroyed."

"Destroyed?"

Again he shrugged. "We know very little about what happened. We expect, or hope, that you can answer those questions for us. But the Ulimite Jews here seem to be the only religious group on the planet. None of the other Ulimites have any sense of the spiritual at all. It's as if part of their psyche has been entirely wiped away, lost."

"They lost their ability to hear their God, or gods," said the aide who had spoken before. "That's what they've told us, anyway."

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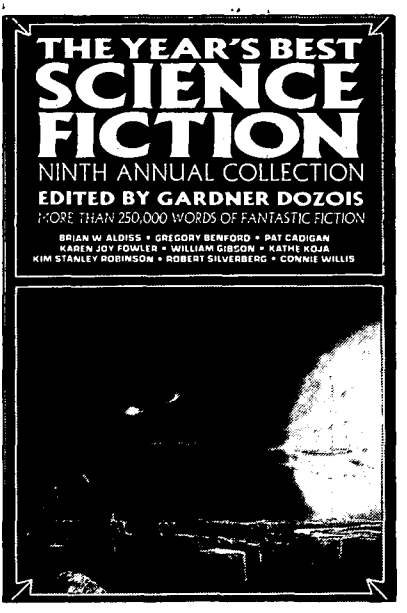
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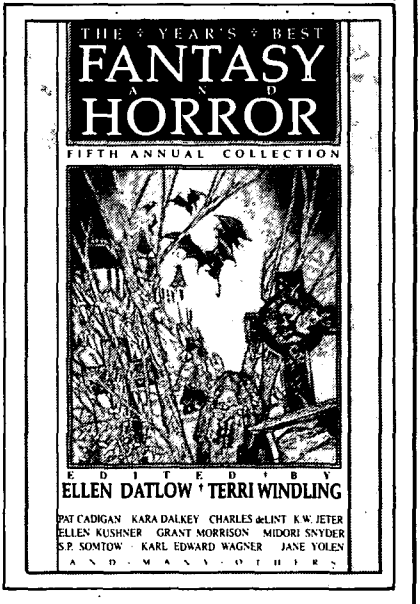
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"And what about the . . . encyclopedia your historians and anthropologists wrote about the Jews?"

"All correct, as far as we know."

"Then they interviewed the Jews?"

"No," the ambassador said. "All the information is gleaned from secondhand sources. Although we know where the Jews live—or think we do—we have not been able to initiate any direct contact, except with their intermediaries."

"Ah, the *shtadlans*," I said. "The fixers. So Tahlmeade is a fixer. . . . But why *should* he help you? You treated him as if he were *dreck*. A nothing."

"He had planned to see you, Rabbi. He understood that it would be impossible for him to join us."

"Why? If no one can *see* him, what's the difference?"

"They sense him and become very nervous. Believe me, it would be a mistake; but you'll see for yourself soon enough."

I waited for him to tell me what I would see soon enough, and when he didn't, I let it alone; I would find out in due time. "How can one believe anything when it's all secondhand and censored, when nothing is mentioned about your claim that the Jews are . . . invisible?" I asked. "Why wasn't that in your reports?"

"This is a very sensitive and . . . explosive issue," the ambassador said. "We considered what to do very carefully, and finally decided to keep the mystery confidential until we've resolved it. All the reports and monographs, although true, are smoke-screens." He paused, as if to study my expression, but I have what's called a poker-face, which I understand has something to do with an ancient game of chance. "There are too many implications for Jews at home," he continued.

"Implications?"

"Something terrible has happened here. We do not wish to give extremists an excuse to kill any more Jews, not after what happened in Savannah."

I didn't retreat from his stare. History repeats itself in different guises. What had once been America was now like ancient Poland.

"You know," I said, "I'm going to ask you something every Jew asks himself: Why *me*?"

The ambassador pushed his chair back, and an aide stood up to help him, although I saw no reason why he needed help. The ambassador was a relatively young man. "Because the Jewish government here, if indeed there *is* a government, *asked* for you."

"Asked for *me*?"

"Over a month ago, Earth time. The one you call Tahlmeade made the request."

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"He asked for *me*?" I was sounding like an echo, but I couldn't help it.

"Yes. He specifically asked for you, by name."

"How could he have known my name?" I asked.

The ambassador stood up and looked at me until I felt uncomfortable. "That's exactly what *we'd* like to know, Rabbi."

Tahlmeade came to the consulate to pick me up. He had come right into the suite where the party was being held in my honor, and was standing in the doorway waiting for me. His prayer shawl was wrapped around himself as if for protection, but it didn't seem to be Tahlmeade who needed protection. The other aliens in the room seemed somehow dislocated, lost; they moved aimlessly about the room, every one in a sudden state of agitation. I could not help but imagine that they were in some kind of psychic pain, yet—if I didn't know better—I would have thought them happy. They were all grinning at each other, at me, at the tables and walls and ceiling.

But their grins were frozen.

And I knew that on Ulim, a smile was not a smile.

Tahlmeade and I left quickly. We rode an elevator though the center of the building, which was a tree, or a forest that had grown into one solid mass. We stepped outside, and for a few moments we were in the streets, streets that smelled like thyme and roses, that were as clean as my wife's (may she rest in peace) table. But the street crowds were agitated, too; people dashed past us and eddied around us, giving us a wide berth.

We were the quiet eye of the storm.

Then Tahlmeade led me below ground, into what seemed to be another city. We waited on a transparent platform that seemed to be situated on the edge of an abyss. Above and below were contrasts of light and dark; but below were huge organic stalactites and stalagmites worked with glastex and metal: trees as large and high as skyscrapers, their flesh smooth and irised. People lived in these illuminated boles, which were connected by communication grids and transportation tubes. I looked down into the descending levels of habitation. I might have been looking at jewels, at strings of light set upon velvet; I might as well have been looking into the eternity of space.

Just looking down made me dizzy, made me a little *meshuggener*.

Made me, God forbid, want to leap into the darkness. But such things I ignore; even when I was young, I had a fear of heights.

A transpod rushed into the station and hushed to a stop. The pod cracked open and we climbed in. Tahlmeade punched in the coordinates, and it suddenly seemed as if we were falling. Yet there was no definite

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sense of motion, just the buildings rushing past us as we sped forward through tubes that choked through the city like transparent vines.

"If you would close the windows," I said in Hebrew, forgetting that phrase was slang for "opaque the walls." "I'm getting dizzy." But Tahlmeade seemed to comprehend what I meant immediately, for in an instant, gray walls surrounded us. Graffitoed images glowed redly over the gray: some smart youngster must have figured out how to change the light patterns.

My dizziness passed, and I asked, "Why can't they see you?" Only after I spoke the words did I realize how blunt I had been.

Tahlmeade frowned at me and said, "Perhaps for the same reason that they are able to see *you*."

I was going to ask him what he meant, yet somehow I knew . . . I *knew* what he meant.

They could not see Tahlmeade because he was a Jew.

But they *could* see me.

And what did they see?

A fraud, a fool, a counterfeit. A phony.

We hurtled forward at three hundred miles an hour, a slight rhythmic vibration and the digital read-outs on the control console the only indications of movement. I tried to communicate with Tahlmeade, but he was preoccupied. One thing was certain: to him I was not a Tzaddik. He stared at the control console as intently as if the apocalyptic words of the Torah were flaming across the screen, and tented his fingers. I interrupted his thoughts a few times, but he simply frowned and then turned back to the console. He was, of course, shutting me out. My questions would have to wait . . . at least, until he awakened.

For he gave himself away when he began to snore.

So our species were not so different, after all.

It took five hours to reach our destination: *Michborah*.

Which meant graveyard.

This was mountain country: cold, rugged, inhospitable, and beautiful. The mountains—white and bald and worn, except for foothill sheathing of bright green scrub—seemed to reach into the hazy expanse of red sky like the towers of a completed Babel, and huge cumulous cloud formations scudded past above, carried on storm-winds. The sky was in constant movement: continents formed and reformed, arms and ships and towers swirled into being, and then dissolved; phantoms and spirits roiled and sailed in pursuit, one after another, chasing themselves into the ominous blackness of a storm, which suddenly erupted, dropping torrents and covering the world in a caftan of fog. The sun was smeary,

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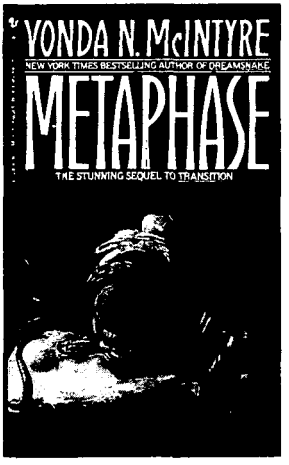

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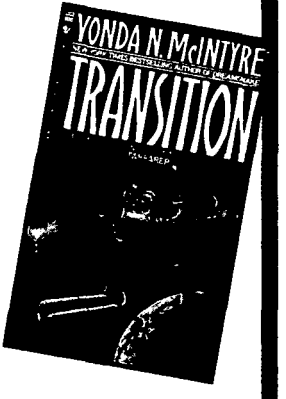

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and low; and night, which came fast on this planet, was but footsteps away.

But night would be like twilight, and the sky like the inside of a dance hall.

I pulled my threadbare coat tightly around me for protection from the rain, which splashed from the wide brim of my hat, and I followed Tahlmeade down the winding road that cut into the side of a mountain; the road was paved with sharp, jagged, and slippery stones. As would be our luck, we were walking along the side of the mountain that offered us no protection from the pounding rain.

Lightning snaked across the sky ahead of us, lighting up cliffs, gorges, and the grotesque rock cones in the valley ahead. I shivered and remembered the blessings: the blessing upon seeing lighting and—I waited a few seconds for the crashing boom of thunder—the blessing upon hearing thunder. A Jew must pronounce a minimum of a hundred blessings every day: a blessing when he gets up, when he eats, prays, goes to bed, puts on clothes, eliminates, sees a rainbow, a scholar, a beautiful or strange-looking person, or hears bad news, or good news. Breathing itself is a prayer, yet breathe as I might, I had been silent for years. Only in public would prayers pass through my mouth as naturally as greetings and commands. Yet just now I remembered my *Tata*, my father, teaching me the prayer over lightning as we both stood in just such a rain as this one.

"Borouch ahtaw Hashem Eloheinu melech ha'olam . . ."

"Well?" Tahlmeade asked. "Are you going to say the blessings, or not?"

Startled, I glanced to the side, as if I would see my father standing there, my father who had been dead for over thirty years: Tahlmeade had asked the question exactly as my father used to, with the same intonation, the same voice, the same accent. In fact, it was as if my father had just spoken to me from Heaven, where there is no distance.

Of course, I didn't believe that for a moment, but nevertheless. . . .

"Did you read my thoughts?" I asked him

"The blessing . . . ?"

I said it: "Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe, who makes the work of Creation."

Together, we said the blessing for thunder: "Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the Universe, for His strength and His power fill the universe."

". . . v-g'vuraso mahlay olam. . . ."

The rain became drizzle as day gave way to twilight.

"Well," I asked again as we walked, "*Did* you read my thoughts?"

"Yes, but not the way you think."

"Then how?"

"You'll see, I assure you, Reb Isaac." It was kind of Tahlmeade to

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address me by the title of teacher, but perhaps that was an Ulimite form of sarcasm. Who could know?

"Nevertheless, I *don't* see."

"You will," Tahlmeade insisted, yet I had the very strong feeling that he was speaking by rote, as a good salesman often does when making a sale, although his thoughts might be entirely elsewhere.

I suddenly smelled something acrid, like smoke, and tar, and as I looked around to discover the source, Tahlmeade said, "Do you smell the volcano, Rebbe? It's old and quiet now, but it was quite an artist in its day, and still wakes up to cough and fart." The road turned and then abruptly ended in a sheer drop. Ahead was a chasm, and below and beyond were canyons within canyons, ravines, and a huge dry lake. Steps cut into the rock led down to a high plateau that was filled with conical fairy chimneys, which were over fifty feet high and capped with hard stone: natural sculptures created by millennia of wind, rain, and snow. But the chimneys were dwarfed by stone chimeras that stood hundreds of feet high and were evenly spaced along terraced cliff walls that had been carved and sculpted and hollowed into a city. The chimeras had heads like cats, or tigers, and the bodies of eagles—that's what they looked like to me, anyway. Yet as I looked down at them, I felt a terrible emptiness, as if somehow gravity itself was leaching away the stuff of my soul, as if I were falling, falling into a grave; and I could only think of Auschwitz, of death and the choking, second-by-second eternity of gasping pain that ended in the chest-still darkness of the ovens.

I felt as if I was looking straight into Hell, and I felt soiled and frightened, for it was horrifyingly, terrifyingly beautiful, in the same way that a cat must appear to the bird caught in its claws.

"Thought is like an atmosphere, like clouds," Tahlmeade said, although I must admit I was still caught by this place, by its dead immensities, and I heard Tahlmeade's voice as if it was my own thoughts, my own internal voice. "Usually you can make out vague shapes, and sometimes you can see with absolute clarity, but not as often as we'd like. So you're making out shapes now, am I correct? And what do you see, Rebbe? What do you see?"

I was fixed on the chimeras and the city carved out of the cliff behind them; the city was like a bas-relief of rust-red arches, columns, cupolas, pavilions, spires, and balustrades, all fluted, the arches and horizontal planes covered with chimeras, smaller versions of those that stood guard below, blindly waiting through the centuries. The storm had blown itself away, leaving the sky pink and still; spirals of clouds seemed to cling to *Me'al'lim*, one of Ulim's two moons, which was now a pale crescent.

"I don't know," I said, replying to his question.

"Yes, you do, Rebbe. Reveal yourself."

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"I fear I am already revealed."

Tahlmeade was silent.

"I feel empty in this place, as if something terrible has happened here. It reminds me of death, of what Jews on Earth refer to as the Holocaust."

"It reminds you of Auschwitz."

"So you know of our history," I said.

"Yes, Rebbe. We know each other's histories."

"What do you mean?" I asked, but Tahlmeade led the way down the steps into the valley, and I followed him.

Into Hell.

The emptiness seemed to take everything from me, especially my questions; it was as if I could feel gravity pulling harder on me with every step. I clung to the side of the stairwell chipped out of the mountainside, afraid that I would become too heavy and fall. Water pooled in the hollows of the steps, and I was careful, for the stone was slippery. I was soaked, and my clothes smelled musty. Once at the bottom, we walked toward the chimeras. The sandy ground was muddy from the rain. As we walked, the sun set, shadows deepened and lengthened, and the shattered remains of Ulim's third moon appeared as pale fire overhead: a celestial rainbow. Now there were two moons in the sky, one vague, the other as sharp and distinct as Earth's, and the stationary fireworks above provided enough light to read by.

I saw movement ahead of me in the distance, and at first imagined that smaller versions of the chimeras were alive and prowling about. They glowed like ocean algae and fluoresced with every movement.

"N'már."

I turned to Tahlmeade, happy to hear a sound in this desolation . . . and then I realized that he had not *said* anything. I thought he had said "tigers."

"This is their mating season," Tahlmeade said; and this time he *was* speaking. "They come here to mate, and to die. Ancient peoples worshipped them, for they believed the animals had souls, which were what they saw glowing." Tahlmeade's skin, which was scored, as if made up of thousands of shale pebbles, glistened, and his wet tallis clung to his shoulders like a mantle. "But don't worry, Rebbe, voracious as they can be, they can't see us . . . or smell us. We are like ghosts, even here—*especially* here."

I felt suddenly weary, exhausted; every step was a trial. I could only concentrate on getting out of here, of putting the great stylized, stone chimeras behind us, souls or no souls, ghosts or no ghosts.

"Now you have no questions," Tahlmeade said. Or perhaps it was a question; I could not be sure. After a beat, he said, "You see, Rebbe, you *are* a Tzaddik."

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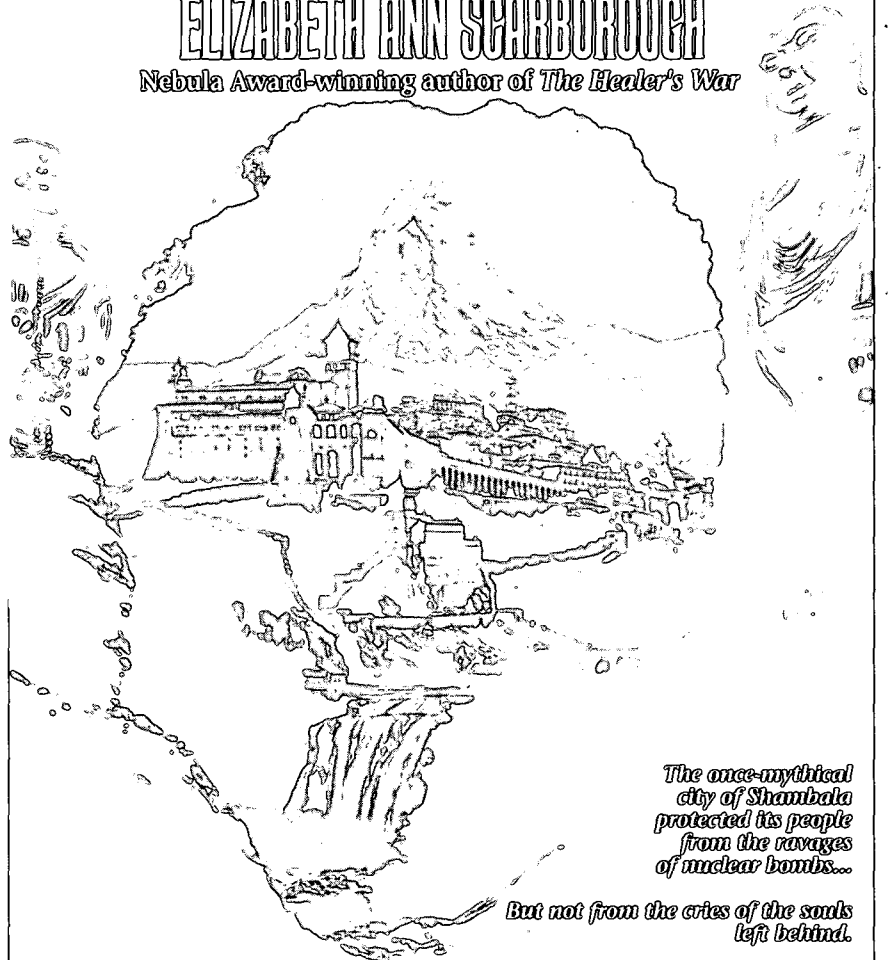

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"What do you mean?"

"Because you can see, and feel, and hear."

"So can all men."

"No, not all men . . . nor all of us."

Although we had turned away from the chimeras and the glowing tigers and had cut across to the southern edge of the field, which was close to us, I felt the place pulling at me, pulling me back as if into a vortex, pulling me to its center, which I imagined was as deep and lifeless as the pits in Poland. Mass graves. . . .

"It is," Tahlmeade said.

"What?" I asked, still shocked at the soft explosion of his thoughts touching my mind.

"It *is* a mass grave, all of it a cemetery. As are the cliffs, the cities in the cliffs: a necropolis. On Earth you have nothing like this, Rebbe. You ask where the Jews are." He swept his hand in the air, as if he were throwing sand. "They are *here*, all twelve million of them. We walk on bones, on lives, on ashes."

"How did this happen?" I asked, but for an instant I could see engines of death working in the labyrinths behind the carved façades in the cliffs. I could smell the charnel house. Here was where Ulimite technology had reached its perfection.

"It happened as it happened on *your* world. Those who killed us, if they were alive to talk, would say their gods told them to do it. *Those* Gods, the *N'már* that guard the ground."

"But you are alive," I said, and there was desperation in my voice. "*We* are alive."

"Do you feel alive . . . here?" Tahlmeade asked, and I felt rooted to the ground, as if their gods had buried me where I stood. For an instant I panicked; but I could indeed still move my arms, my legs.

"Is it because of what happened here that your brethren can't see you?" I asked.

Tahlmeade did not answer my question, but said, "The statues are almost as old as the cliffs. This place is known as the Valley of Creation." He frowned, as if savoring the irony, and then led the way to a corner of the cliff wall and into an arched entrance flanked by fluted columns, all carved into the stone.

I followed him through pitch-dark catacombs.

I was blind, but I could feel the weight of the dead all around me, as heavy as the crushing darkness itself.

I was breathing it, dissolving in it.

And then I saw light, a dim flicker at the end of a long tunnel. I felt relieved, as if I had escaped the death that permeated the very air of the Valley of Creation; death was like a thought, and thought like a vapor, or

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perhaps an odor, a perfume that could be breathed, inhaled and exhaled, passing from one person to another. Thus could I feel the heaviness of the martyrs buried in the valley . . . thus could I hear Tahlmeade even when he didn't speak.

We walked out of the catacomb into the bright night, and my mood suddenly lightened, as if the mass of the mountain we had passed through was acting like a psychic shield.

"Good *Shabbos*," Tahlmeade said. He frowned at me and nodded his head; his mood, too, had changed.

So on Ulim it was Friday, *Erev Shabbos*: Sabbath eve.

"I apologize that we had to pass through Gehenna to greet the Queen Bride of the Sabbath, but I assure you, she is here."

The Sabbath was a Queen to be made welcome, for she was the foretaste of Heaven, God's great gift to those who obeyed his Torah. But for me, for years, *Shabbos* was not a gift, not a freedom, but a prison of rules and regulations. It was, of course, not enough merely to *obey* the Law. You had to *believe* in it, take joy from it, give yourself up to it.

I was bursting with questions, but *Shabbos* would not allow sadness or bitterness: I would have to wait.

A *Shabbos* calmness came over me, such as I hadn't felt in years.

"Good *Shabbos*," I whispered.

We came to a sheer cliff that looked unscalable. Tahlmeade guided me through a concealed opening in the rock, and we took a lifter deep inside the mountain.

It was cold and bitter atop the mountain plateau, yet this place was verdant: trees were thick, if stunted, and we took a winding road through forest. Past the edge of the forest with its sharp tang of wood and sap, we came to fields covered with flowers that appeared translucent in the night light; and the ring glittered above, a metallic rainbow of color that appeared and reappeared as cloud masses scudded across it. The haze of aurorae was purple and pink, sheets of gauze that seemed to shimmer in the sky like illuminated silk curtains.

"It's beautiful," I said. "But how can anything grow in this cold?" I pulled my coat around me.

"The ground is warm, Rebbe. You see, your feet aren't cold. The mountain is alive, it breathes, and one day, it will explode." He frowned. I was beginning to understand his humor.

Children were shouting ahead; they stood on the edge of the field and were bundled in shiny black caftans and caps. Behind them was the village, which seemed ethereal in the colored veils of night. The town seemed to be cut out of the mountain itself, but it was an incongruous, yet charming marriage of wood and stone: elongated domes sat upon

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thick towers; other buildings were tent-shaped, and had galleries with open sides to give shelter; and everything was glimmerous and multihued, as if the village was mimicking the heavens.

"Rebbe Tahlmeade!" they shouted, and waved their arms. "Good *Shabbos*."

Tahlmeade motioned to them, and then stopped walking. He looked up at the sky, at the ring—at Ulim's night rainbow—and made a prayer. He gazed at me steadily and said, "The rainbow is our covenant, just as it is yours."

He continued to stare at me, making me uncomfortable. I was beginning to realize that Tahlmeade was not merely a fixer, an intermediary, as the ambassador mistakenly thought, but that he must be the Tzaddik himself.

"Have you nothing to say to that?" he asked.

"The children, if they are children, are waiting for you."

"Waiting will not hurt them. And, yes, Rebbe, of course they are children."

"What do you wish me to say, Rebbe." I had to smile, for I had not called him a rabbi before. Then I caught myself, for I remembered that a smile did not signal pleasure to a Ulimite.

"I wish you to say the truth. That you believe the Covenant has been broken."

"Can it be otherwise?" I asked. "You have been nearly destroyed. Did God hear your prayers? And do *nothing*?" I recited the words of the Prophets, one of the Thirteen Articles of Faith, " 'I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be His name, rewards those who keep His commandments and punishes those who transgress them.' Is that not the pact between God and the Jewish people? But if Jews are to remain Jews, they must suspend that; they must suspend all traditional doctrine and remove God from history, for it would be sacrilege even to *contemplate* that God would allow millions of innocent children to die as punishment for the sins of other Jews!" After I said that, I asked, out of respect, "But do you wish to speak of such things on the Sabbath?"

"One can always question, Rebbe, especially on the Sabbath, for that is the time when God is most visible."

"Let me ask you, then, if you *knew* that the Holocaust would come to the next generation, would you raise your children Jewish? If Jews are responsible to each other, you to me, me to you, and both of us to all of them"—I motioned toward the children, who were waiting impatiently—"then those who died in the Holocaust did *not* die because they failed to keep the Covenant. They died because their grandparents and parents *kept* it. So, Rebbe, I suppose I answered my own question. They

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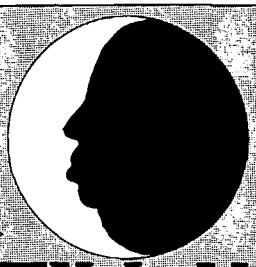

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did die because of the sins of others . . . the sin of their parents for remaining faithful to the Covenant!"

"So God has abandoned us?" Tahlmeade said.

"Unless you wish to believe our respective Holocausts were the means by which God tested his people, as he did Job. But I cannot imagine such a cruel conclusion."

"Then what *do* you imagine, Rebbe?"

"Emptiness," I said. The cold worked itself over my face until I felt I was wearing a mask.

"Better Job." Tahlmeade frowned and then made a coughing noise, which I understood as a laugh—but I could not tell if it was good-natured or derisive. He opened his arms and walked toward the children, who ran to meet us. Their small, pebbled faces seemed very gray; perhaps it was the light of the night, or the cold. "Perhaps you'll feel differently when you jump the road."

"What?" I asked, surprised. "Jumping the Road" was an old superstition, like the "evil eye."

"We'll talk tomorrow, Rebbe, after you've—" The children distracted him with questions.

But I learned what he meant that night.

In the middle of the night, as light poured like mercury though the small high windows of my little room in the highest part of Tahlmeade's house, I listened to the voices downstairs and dreamed.

I felt myself being hurled into the darkness. Yet who could imagine speed without the reference of light or the pressure of gravity? Perhaps I flew. Perhaps I fell.

To Earth. Into the heart of Philadelphia. Into the Tzaddik's court.

Into the Tzaddik's dream.

"So, have you renewed your faith?" he asked. We sat on stone steps in the ruins of a synagogue; after all, it was my Tzaddik's dream.

"I'm asleep," I said.

"As am I, but certainly you'll remember this when you wake up."

"Remember what?"

"That you jumped the road and spoke with your Tzaddik." He smiled at me, and then looked down at his age-freckled hands, which rested on his lap. He was several years younger than me, yet I always thought of him as much older. (Of course, how much older than me could anyone *be* and still be alive?) His beard was mottled white and gray, which gave it a yellowish cast.

"I told Tahlmeade that you were a Tzaddik," he continued. "I told him that you had the *'kuk,'* that you could 'see.' But I told him you didn't

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know any of these things." When I didn't reply, he said, "Of course, Tahlmeade helped you jump, just to get you started."

To "jump the road" was to see into other places without being there. It was the miraculous means by which Tzaddiks could help and protect other Jews who were in trouble.

It was pure, unadulterated, medieval, Jewish superstition.

"If it's superstition, then what are you doing here?" the Tzaddik asked. "You came to *me*."

"I am *not* here," I said.

"Well, as long as you aren't here, do you wish to ask me a question?"

"Ah, so you'll give me proof that I've jumped the road."

"Tahlmeade told you that you would do so. Doesn't that tell you anything?"

"It tells me that I'm suggestible."

"Ask him how Jews came to be on two planets," the Tzaddik said. "And tell Ruchel that I send my felicitations."

Ruchel was Tahlmeade's wife. But *I* knew that, and it was *my* dream.

I awakened with a start, and stared up at the ceiling, which, like the walls, seemed to be constructed out of one solid piece of wood the color of mahogany. I wiped my eyes, for the ceiling seemed to be moving, undulating ever so slightly, but that had to be an effect of the light drifting in.

I heard something, whisperings that seemed to be right here in the room. A voice that could not be denied, for I could not help but think that God was speaking directly to me.

Giving me a history lesson.

The children woke me up with an aromatic glass of sweetened tea. It was barely dawn, and the light made everything in the room seem soft and gauzy. My back ached from sleeping on the mattress on the floor, for I was too large to fit on the bed, sumptuous as it might be. I sat up and thanked these two tiny versions of Tahlmeade, dressed in their Sabbath best. They fell over each other to get out of the room and made loud chirping noises as they ran down the hallway; I assumed they were feigning terror, for I understood their chirps to be laughter. Last night at *Shabbos* dinner, they stared at me throughout the meal, except when Tahlmeade made them sing the *z'miros*, the traditional songs of praise.

As I dressed, I remembered that I had dreamed of my Tzaddik, and that he had told me—no, a voice had whispered to me, whispered the answer to my questions . . . but I couldn't remember. It frustrated me for a moment, and then I shrugged it off and went downstairs. Dreams were always like that. They make sense only to the sleeper.

By the time I came downstairs, the house was already filled with

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people, male Ulimites wearing shiny hats and large black-and-white prayer shawls the size of blankets. Like Tahlmeade, they dressed in black caftans that were tied around the waist with cords to separate the lofty parts from the profane. There must have been sixty Ulimites in the living room and more crowded in doorways, all here for the privilege of accompanying Tahlmeade to synagogue. Tahlmeade's home, I should mention, was huge, more an inn than a house for a single family. It was all rather plainly furnished, except for the dining room, where the candelabra and kiddish cups were kept. Tahlmeade's table could comfortably seat twenty-five, and at the head was his golden chair: a throne. The table was filled for every meal, for many of his followers had sacrificed to come to his court; in return, he gave advice and relief and expounded the word of God—who better to do so, for was he not a direct conduit to the Creator?

We went to the *shul*, to the synagogue, like a conquering army returning home. It was a parade, and everyone was in uniform, as I was. I was dressed no differently than the Ulimites—the black caftan and prayer shawl—and as I entered the *shul* with the crowd, as I was seated near the eastern wall—a place of honor—I remembered that I had jumped the road last night. I remembered my dream, talking to my Tzaddik. There was more to the dream, though, but I could not recall what it might have been.

Tahlmeade sat in a plushly upholstered high-backed chair beside the red-curtained Ark where the Holy Scrolls reposed; he looked out upon his congregation, as if each person was a book that he could read in a trice. The shul was packed, every seat accounted for, both upstairs and downstairs (for the women, dressed in their drab finery, sat together in the balcony, separated from the men by tradition, if not choice); and in the rear, around a study table, stood the *prosteh yidden*, those without learning.

"Better an educated bastard than an ignorant rabbi."

That's from the Talmud, which has something to say about everything.

A cantor led the morning *Shacharis* service, and I *davened*, which is how Jews pray—we rock back and forth, as if shaking out the prayers from a saltshaker. Like shaking oneself into a trance. Well, that's how the Ulimites in the *shul* prayed, every one of them; their yarmulkes were pulled over their hairless heads, their pebbly faces were expressionless. I must confess to becoming caught up in the mood, caught up in the familiarity of the surroundings, the chanting, the prayers and blessings, the readings from the Torah that was resplendent upon the *bimah* platform, which was itself crowded with honored "guests of the Holy Scrolls." It was true: a Jew can go anywhere among Jews and be at home. So did I feel at home on this faraway world, with aliens whose faces were like

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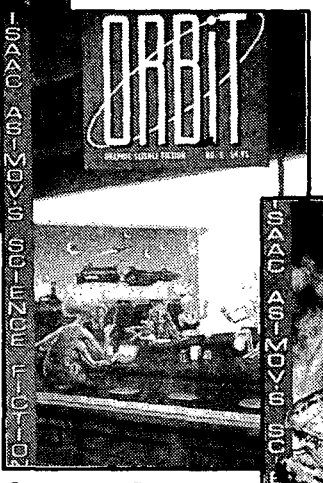

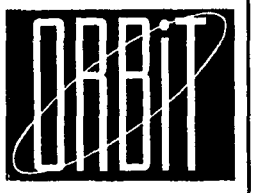

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blue leather with bumps. I felt sleepy, as I always did in *shul* on *Shabbos*, for it was a day to rest. One could not light a fire or switch on a light, for today God was in control. He was the maker and shaker. Not us.

But could I *believe*, as I sat and rested with strangers who looked like nothing I had ever seen?

Let's just say that I was comfortable. That was enough, and I could lose myself in the moment, in the prayers that were said standing up with feet together, as if at attention. I was called up to the *bimah* to read from the Scrolls. I bowed and shook everyone's hand when I was finished. I returned to my seat. It was *pro forma*, familiar. Like sleeping in your own bed. As I prayed, I thought about my dream, and remembered. "Ask him how Jews came to be on two planets," my Tzaddik had said. And what would Tahlmeade tell me? That Jews have been jumping the road for centuries, for millennia?

That would explain how these Jews came to be.

Or perhaps it would explain how the Jews on *Earth* came to be. . . .

But it was superstition. I could more easily believe that worlds and universes were splitting into 10^{100+} imperfect copies of themselves: the Isaac ibn Chabib quantum theory of creating Jews.

"He who pays attention to dreams should have his head examined."

That's from Isaac ibn Chabib, not the Talmud.

Thus the service went on, from the morning into the afternoon, sleeping hours dissolving into an aromatic Jewish stew of routine and memory. As we prayed, I suddenly realized that, indeed, the world around me was dissolving. Praying was a dream, and the congregation dreamed.

They dreamed Tahlmeade's dream. . . .

And I found myself alone. In the Valley of Creation.

The Jews who had died, their twelve million souls massing like clouds in the sky, whispered to me, telling me their myriad stories. They were safe, beyond pain and chance and care.

But the *other* Jews—those who were alive and singing and chanting and praying with me in the synagogue—had disappeared.

For their dream was death and oblivion. It was protection. It was a river: Lethe, the drowning river of forgetfulness.

A river that covered the world.

So this was a dream . . . and it wasn't a dream. If I were religious in the sense that I had set out to be when I entered the rabbinate, I would call it a revelation. I had entered what the sages called *Pardes*, which means orchard, or Paradise. Ah, irony of ironies, that revelation would come to me on the mountain of graves. The Talmud tells the story of the

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four rabbis who entered Pardes: Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Ben Abuyah, and the great Rabbi Akiba. (Of course, it's not the Talmud that tells the story. But for Jews the Talmud is like a person; when we read the sages in this tractate or that, it is as if the Talmud itself is talking.) They all entered Pardes through their dreams, which took the form of fiery chariots. Akiba said to the other travelers, "Don't be distracted, lest you lose yourselves," but Ben Azzai looked about and lost his soul, Ben Zoma lost his way, and Ben Abuyah became an apostate. Only Rabbi Akiba entered in peace and departed with his life.

I'm certainly no Akiba, or Ben Zoma—perhaps a Ben Abuyah, God forbid—but here I was in the dream that was not a dream. Like them I had, indeed, jumped the road; and this time without Tahlmeade's help. If Tahlmeade was worth his robes, he would be searching for me frantically right now. But I had learned a few more things, and I wouldn't let him in.

Here I sat in the Valley of Creation beside a fairy chimney the color of chalk, facing the stone chimeras and the city of death hollowed out of the cliffs. The chimeras rose above me like Incan cenotaphs, huge and stylized and not yet worn smooth by the turbulent elements. The sky was clear, washed of clouds, and the cliffs stood sharply against it. It was cold, but I felt nothing of the physical senses: wind was an idea, sight a shadow, voice an abstraction.

And as I sat facing death, listening to the instructions of dead martyrs, the collective unconscious of the Ulimite Jewish race, I watched the glowing tigers, the *N'már*, padding around me, sniffing the air. They were frustrated, for although they could see me, they couldn't detect my essence.

You see, Tahlmeade hadn't told me that the tigers could not be seen by *most* people. That was their defense mechanism. But through the eons there were those who had learned to see them . . . who saw them as souls glowing in the light. Who worshipped them and learned to use them as familiars.

Just so had Tahlmeade, who had inherited the second sight and the mantle of the Tzaddik, learned to use them to protect those in his charge: all the Jews. He had learned from his father, who had learned from *his* father.

Thus, Jews had become like the *N'már*.

Invisible.

Invulnerable . . . for how can you kill what you can't see?

A tiger stood before me, gazing at me, as I gazed at him. The creature seemed to draw my essence through its burning eyes, and I had to anchor myself to my own reality, to my past and present, or I would become another Rabbi Ben Azzai, who lost his soul in Pardes.

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But as I stared into those numinous eyes, I drew the creature to *me*. I took its habits and its tricks of evolution.

And I knew then what I had to do.

I met Tahlmeade in the *bais medrash* after sunset: the conclusion of the Sabbath. The *bais medrash*, which means "House of Study," was a small room in the Synagogue. It had a high ceiling and long narrow windows, which let in the hazy starglow. I could see comets raining like fire through the narrow slats.

We both sat across from each other at a study table piled with ancient books and interactives that rested inches above the tables like rectangular clouds.

"I looked for you during the afternoon," Tahlmeade said, touching an interactive, which spoke and shivered into being, becoming its subject: another touch and it would transform the entire room into a mnemonic of the twentieth century mystical text *Sh'ar Hayichud* by Rabbi Dov Ber of Lubavitch. Tahlmeade withdrew his finger and the interactive dissolved into its former state. "It seems that you have become quite efficient at Jumping the Road, Rebbe."

"You are a good teacher."

"Ah, so your Tzaddik told you that I gave you an initial push to get you started."

"He did," I said.

"Then you believe?"

"Only after you pulled the entire congregation into your dream this afternoon."

"But *you* were not pulled into our dream," Tahlmeade said. "Why?"

"Do you think that I have some great strength that I was not sucked into your dream?" I asked. "I could see into your dream, and it frightened me. But then I am not a courageous man. No, Rebbe, I simply dreamed my *own* dream. The Valley of Creation drew me to itself, the souls of your martyrs—of our martyrs—drew me to them. It was the power of the dead. They snatched me into their dream before you could carry me into yours."

"So you chose death."

"It wasn't a matter of choice, Rebbe." I paused, and then said, "But I know what you have done."

Tahlmeade looked at me intently and nodded his head slightly as he read my thoughts, my memories. "So you know the *N'már*. You have seen the tigers."

I nodded

"And you have spoken to the dead."

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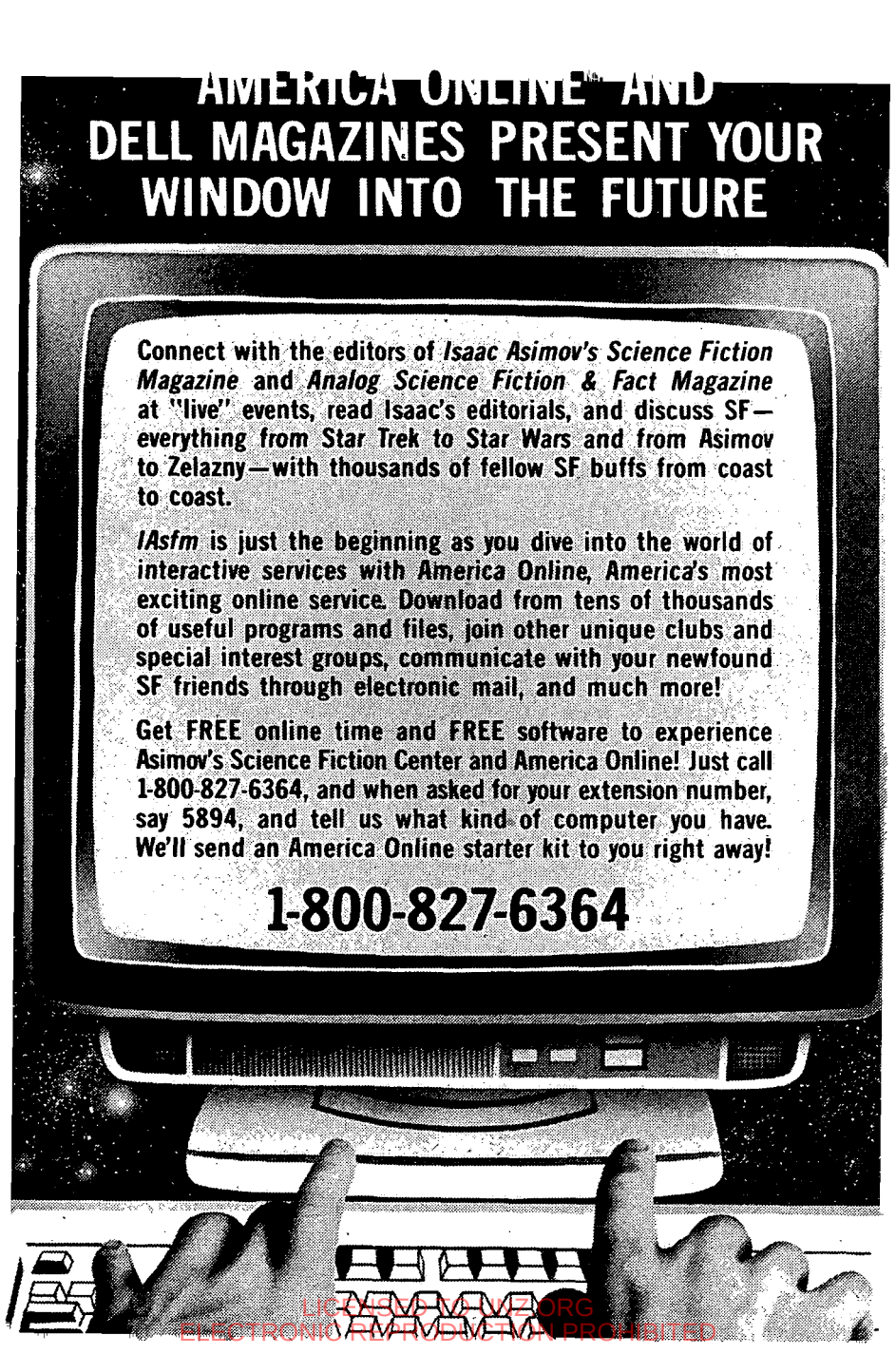

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"I heard voices," I said. "Perhaps I heard the tigers, perhaps they've absorbed—"

"You are a strange creature, Rebbe," Tahlmeade said. "You disbelieve your own senses because they conflict with your preconceptions. You spoke to the dead. You spoke to the tigers. Now you know."

"And you know what I must do."

"You wish to give us up, to reveal us to the world."

"You have not only hidden yourselves," I said. "You have taken the Gentiles' souls from them; you have taken their religion, their spirit."

"We simply concealed ourselves," Tahlmeade said.

"No, you did *more* than that. You stole from them. You took revenge. You've—" I paused, searching for words. "It's very much like murder."

"No, Rebbe, it was *they* who murdered us. We have blinded them, perhaps, but no more than that."

"And would you blind them unto the fourth generation?" I asked "Until they became machines? When would you stop? When would you stop being afraid? When there were no more Gentiles left alive . . . ?" Tahlmeade did not answer, so I continued; after all, I have a reputation for stuffing my feet into my mouth, for speaking when listening would be a *mitzvah*, a judicious act of kindness. "You have robbed them," I said, quoting *Tosefta Baba Kamma*: "It's a more heinous crime for a Jew to rob a Gentile than a Jew, for such a crime involves the desecration of the Name. And does not the *Sefer Hasidim* say, 'If a Jew attempts to kill a Gentile, help the Gentile'? You must stop dreaming their souls away, Tahlmeade. You must return to the world."

"You, who believe that the Holocaust has rendered all traditional doctrine absurd . . . *you* are quoting *Tosefta Baba Kamma* and *Sefer Hasidim* to me? You, who cannot even find his *own* faith, you would preach to *me* in the words of the sages?" Tahlmeade smiled at me, showing small, even teeth: an expression of pure hatred. "The Gentiles will only kill us again," he said in a soft voice, as if he were teaching a child.

"You are killing *yourselves* by robbing *them*. My hypocrisy or lack of faith will not change that."

"We will not submit to them," Tahlmeade said. "We will not allow another Holocaust, another Valley of Creation."

I pushed myself away from the table and stood up.

"I cannot let you leave, Rebbe."

"You cannot stop me," I said; and I allowed myself to dream the beast, the tiger, the *N'már*. I would jump the road. I would leave this place in the time it takes a hummingbird to flap its wings. And Tahlmeade would not find me, just as he had not been able to find me when I was in the Valley of Creation. I had learned from the beasts . . . just as Tahlmeade had, and as his father before him.

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I could be as invisible as the Jews of Ulim.

I slipped into a dream, a dream of glowing tigers, and I imagined myself . . . away. But I was lead. I was all mass, as heavy as any body without its root, without its soul.

And Tahlmeade could see me, as I could see him. We could not disappear from each other's sight. We could not escape each other's grasp. Tahlmeade stared into me like fire, for he was fire. He was the tiger, the beast.

And the *bais medrash* began to burn with a cold light.

As stars fell by outside the windows.

Tahlmeade and I were locked claw to claw, eye to eye, in mortal combat.

Whosoever would let go—let down his guard—would suffer. We two were tigers fighting in a dream—*N'már*—each caught in the grip of the other. Our eyes were our weapons, for they are the mirrors of the soul. Tahlmeade and I fought and burned. I tried to pull away, to disappear, to jump the road, to escape. But Tahlmeade was like my own thought, my own volition, myself.

It was a stalemate.

I remembered being in the Valley of Creation and staring at the tiger. As he gazed at me, so had I gazed at *him*; and he tried to draw my essence into his burning eyes. Eyes of fire, of sleep, of dream, of loss, of perdition. So it was now, except Tahlmeade was no *N'már*. He was much, much stronger.

He drew me into his eyes, into his dream. . . .

As I drew him into mine.

And yet, for all this wrestling of souls and minds, we were sitting quietly at the study table in the *bais medrash*: two Jews staring each other down. Two Jews trying to jump the road, trying to escape each other by any means possible.

But we found ourselves jumping the road *together*, as if we had but one will . . . as if our two dreams had suddenly merged into one, and the one became a chariot, the same chariot that Ezekiel had seen in a vision. In just such a chariot had the four sages—Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Ben Abuyah, and Akiba—entered Paradise.

We were hurled like a meteor into the darkness.

And a voice said, "How dare you disgrace yourselves before this court! Stop fighting! Immediately!"

It sounded like my Tzaddik.

I was not surprised to find that it *was*.

Tahlmeade stood beside me; before us were the Tzaddik and two other men.

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I had been here before when I jumped the road and met the Tzaddik. We were in the courtyard of a ruined temple, a synagogue. The air was warm and full of moisture, and the sun was high in the sky. I thought I was back in the Tzaddik's dream, in Philadelphia, but he corrected my thoughts and revealed that we were not in our own time, or place. We were in Judea, in a place called *Benei Berak*, and we were standing before the judges of a *Bais Din*: a Rabbinical Court. The Tzaddik and the two other men who were as old as me—as old as the sand itself—sat upon cushions, which faced east, the direction of prayer. They sat, and we stood, upon cracked and crumbling stone. Although I did not know the other two men, I knew the seating arrangements for a *Bais Din*: the one who sat in the center—who leaned forward—as if to hear every word, even when nothing was being said, was the *Nasi*, the big shot: the president of the Court. The Tzaddik and the other rabbi were his deputies.

They were certainly all Tzaddiks, all saints. They all clucked their tongues and shook their heads as we stood before them.

"You should be ashamed," the *Nasi* said to us. "You are learned men, not brawlers."

"To be one is to be the other," I said, but the Tzaddiks were not receptive to my wit.

Tahlmeade began to speak, but the *Nasi* interrupted him and said, "All has been decided. You will do as Rebbe Isaac ibn Chabib asks. We sent him to you. You received him. Now let him liberate you."

"*Avol*—" Tahlmeade began to say, which was "but" in Hebrew.

"There is no argument, Rebbe," the *Nasi* said to Tahlmeade.

Tahlmeade stood rigid as a bar mitzvah boy saying the blessings in front of an entire congregation. He smiled, but would not go against the decision of a *Bais Din*.

Perhaps the Tzaddiks misunderstood his expression of hatred and frustration and anger, for they smiled back at him.

On second thought, perhaps they did understand.

So even if Jumping the Road wasn't a dream but a form of revelation, we would dream ourselves back to *Ulim* in a fiery chariot. (After all, rabbis are naturally a grandiloquent and flamboyant lot.)

But before I departed, I asked the *Nasi* one question: "Who are you, Rebbe?"

"Elazar ben Azaryah Akiba," he said, leaning toward me.

Rabbi Akiba. . . ?

"But don't worry, Isaac," he said. "You're not in Paradise."

So now . . . we shall see what we shall see.

The Ulimite Gentiles will soon be able to remember . . . to hear the

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voices of their Gods and their consciences again. What will their voices tell them to do?

Who can know? (Well, perhaps Rabbi Akiba knows, but the rest of us *potzers*—those of us who barely manage to get by—we'll just have to take our chances.) Even if we are to be slaughtered in the next generation, even if we will have to become invisible again, even if we have to fight like animals, we will live *today*. We *will* endure.

And as for myself—

I decided to stay right here and see this thing through.

So do I believe in miracles?

Do I believe in God?

Perhaps it is enough to say that I believe in *Shabbos*. I believe in its bready tastes, its music and spicy smells. When the candles flicker and gutter like life itself, when the kiddish cups glisten and the stars fall into the night like fireworks, I can feel *something* . . . the Queen Bride of the Sabbath . . . the *Shekhinah*, which is the holy presence, the second soul we are given for but one day a week. And then I, too, can taste *Pardes* . . . Paradise.

And after all, if *I* can be a Tzaddik, then who am I to doubt the Creator? ●

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Jackson, Shirley, "One Ordinary Day, with Peanuts" in *The Best from F and SF, Fifth Series,* ed. Anthony Boucher.
Merril, Judith, "That Only a Mother" in *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame, Volume One,* ed. Robert Silverberg.
O'Donnell, Lawrence (C.L. Moore & Henry Kuttner) "Vintage Season" in *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame, Volume Two A,* ed. Robert Silverberg.
Reed, Kit, "The Food Farm," in *SF 12,* ed. Judith Merril.
Reed, Kit, "The Wait," in *The Best from F and SF, Eighth Series,* ed. Anthony Boucher.
St. Clair, Margaret, "Horrer Howce," in *Galaxy: 30 Years of Innovative SF,* ed. Fred Pohl, Martin Greenberg, and J.D. Olander.

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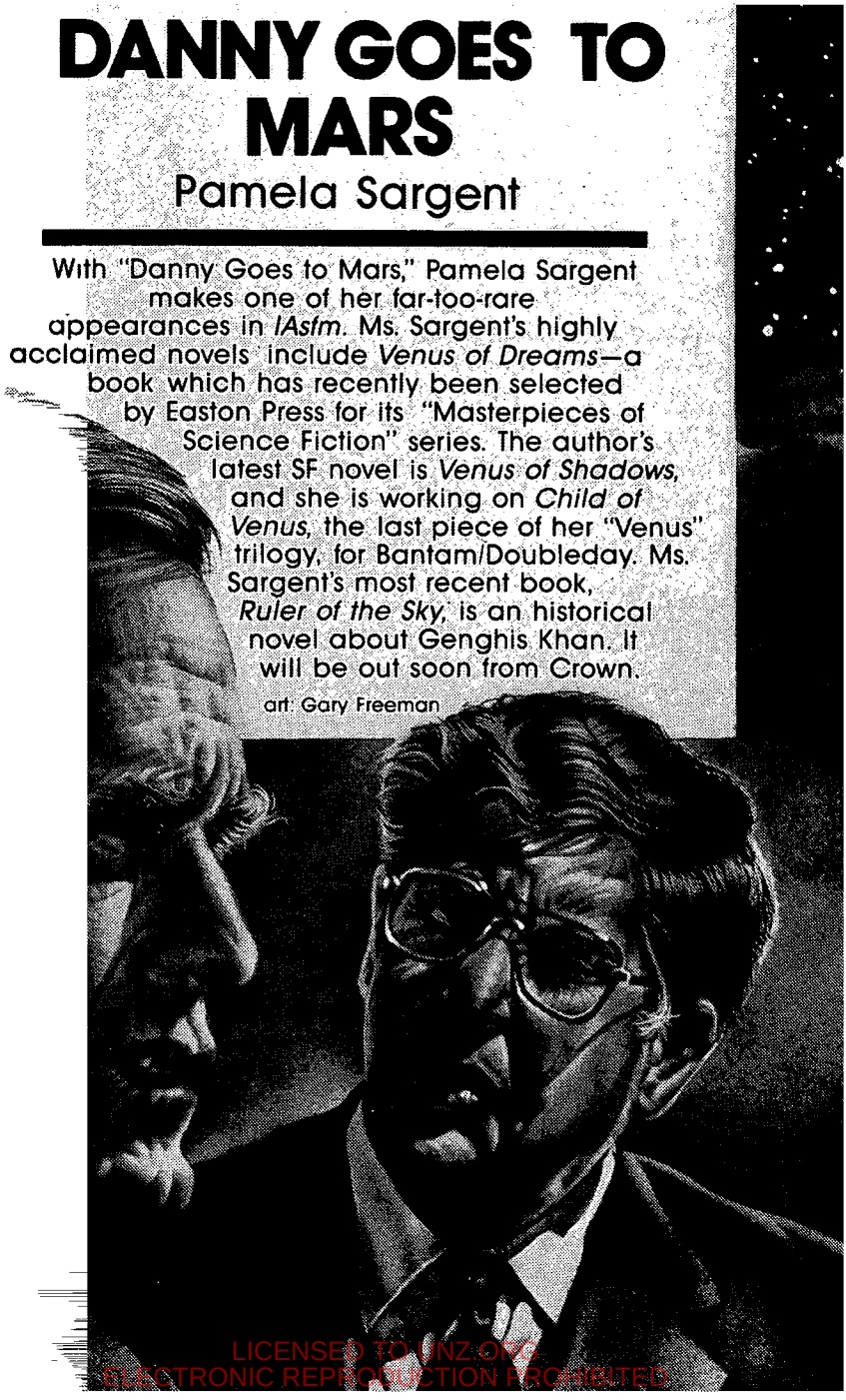
DANNY GOES TO MARS

Pamela Sargent

With "Danny Goes to Mars," Pamela Sargent makes one of her far-too-rare appearances in *IAsfm*. Ms. Sargent's highly acclaimed novels include *Venus of Dreams*—a book which has recently been selected by Easton Press for its "Masterpieces of Science Fiction" series. The author's latest SF novel is *Venus of Shadows*, and she is working on *Child of Venus*, the last piece of her "Venus" trilogy, for Bantam/Doubleday. Ms. Sargent's most recent book, *Ruler of the Sky*, is an historical novel about Genghis Khan. It will be out soon from Crown.

art: Gary Freeman



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"Mars is essentially in the same orbit [as Earth]. Mars is somewhat the same distance from the sun, which is very important. We have seen pictures where there are canals, we believe, and water. If there is water, that means there is oxygen. If oxygen, that means we can breathe."

—J. Danforth Quayle, Vice-President of the United States, as quoted in *Mother Jones*, January 1990

The Vice-President had known that this White House lunch would be different. For one thing, the President's voice kept shifting from his Mr. Rogers pitch to his John Wayne tone, and that always made Dan nervous. For another, the former Chief of Staff was there as a guest, and that bothered him.

John Sununu might have mouthed off in public about how much Dan had learned on the job, but away from the cameras, his big M.I.T. brain couldn't be bothered with even saying hello to the Vice-President. Not that it really mattered, since Nunu, as most of the White House staff called him behind his back, had pretty much treated everybody that way, except when he was having a temper tantrum. Almost everyone had been relieved when the former Chief of Staff had been eased out of that position.

Now, here he was in the White House again, sitting around at this intimate lunch as if he still had the President's full confidence. Maybe the President needed Big John's help on some scientific deal or other; Dan hoped it was that, and not something political. He squinted slightly, thinking of Robert Stack. That was the ticket, putting on that Robert Stack I'm-a-nice-guy-but-don't-mess-with-me kind of expression.

"A squeaker," the President said, "a real squeaker. Almost didn't pull it out. The Democrats—bad. Attack from the right—even worse. Got something up our sleeve, though—they'll say, Never saw *that* coming."

The Vice-President tried to look attentive. Sometimes he couldn't figure out what the President was talking about. Once he had worried about that, before discovering that many members of the White House staff had the same problem.

"Council on Competitiveness, and, uh, the space thing, too—you're our man there," the President was saying now. Marilyn had guessed that the President might be toying with the idea of a space spectacular, and Big John, whatever his lacks in the political arena, was one of the few advisors who could understand the scientific ins and outs. It made sense, what with that big breakthrough in developing an engine for space travel. Dan didn't know exactly how it worked, but it could get a ship to the Moon almost overnight—if there was an "overnight" in space.

"Mars," the president said. "About time."

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"Mars?" Dan sat up. That was an even better idea than going to the Moon.

"We're sending out feelers." The former Chief of Staff adjusted his glasses, looking as if this project was his idea. Maybe it was; maybe that was how he had gotten back into the President's good graces. "The Japanese have hinted they might foot most of the bill if one of their people is among the astronauts. The Saudis'll pick up the rest if we get one of their men on board. The Russians would do almost anything to take their people's minds off the mess over there, and we can use one of those long-term habitat modules they've developed for the crew's quarters. Putting a cosmonaut on the crew in return for that would be a hell of a lot cheaper than sending more aid down that rathole."

"Impressive," the President said. "Won't cost us."

"We can get this going before the mid-term elections," Big John muttered. "America's reaching for the stars again—that should play pretty goddamned well, and you can use the brotherhood angle, too." He shifted his stocky body in his chair. "A crash program for building the ship will create jobs. The crew can be trained, and the ship ready to go, by the summer of '95. Two weeks or less to Mars, depending on where it is in relation to Earth's orbit, and back in plenty of time for the presidential primaries."

"With the new nuclear fission-to-fusion pulse engine," Dan said, "that's possible." He'd picked up a few things during his meetings with the Space Council. He was a little annoyed that no one had even hinted at the possibility of a Mars trip, but then he was usually the last guy to find anything out. "With that kind of engine, we could cross from, say, Mercury to Jupiter in less than a hundred days." He had heard one of the NASA boys say that. Or had it been less than thirty days? Not that it made that much difference, at least to him.

The former Chief of Staff lifted his brows in surprise. Sununu had a habit of looking at him like that sometimes, the way Dan's high school teachers and college professors had looked at him when he actually managed to come up with a correct answer.

"But you know," the Vice-President continued, "you could take longer to train the crew, and have this whole Mars deal going on during the primary season. That might actually help me more, having it happen right while I'm running."

"Two terms," the President said, sounding a lot more like John Wayne than Mr. Rogers this time. "Straight line from nineteen-eighty. I want a Republican in the White House in two-thousand-and-one. Maybe the Navy band could play that music at the inauguration, you know, the piece in that movie—"

"*Also Sprach Zarathustra,*" the former Chief of Staff said, then turned

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toward the Vice-President. "The theme from *2001*." He had that funny smile on his face, the one that made his eyes seem even colder.

"What I was thinking, though," Dan said, "is that people have short memories." That was a piece of political wisdom he had picked up, partly because his own memory wasn't so great. "So it might make more sense to have a ship on Mars right in the middle of the primaries. It'd sure be a help to be able to make speeches about that, and—"

"Unless something goes wrong. That could really fuck up the campaign, a big space disaster." Big John folded his arms over his broad chest. "But we'll just have to see that doesn't happen. Besides, that sucker has to be back before the primaries." His smile faded. "See, the thing is—"

"On the crew, Dan," the President interrupted. "Still young, and you're in good shape—think it'll work."

The Vice-President set down his fork. "What would work?"

The former Chief of Staff unfolded his arms. "The President is saying that he'd like you to go to Mars."

Dan was too stunned to speak.

"If you'll volunteer, that is," the President said.

The Vice-President steadied himself, hoping his eyes had not widened into his Bambi-caught-in-the-headlights look. Big John might be willing to shove him aboard a ship heading for Mars just to get back in the good graces of the White House, but the President, for a guy without a whole lot of principles, was a gentleman. A man who never forgot to write thank-you notes wasn't the kind of person to force his Veep on a risky space mission.

"Well." Dan frowned. "Do I really have to do this?"

Big John said, "It may be the only way we can get you elected. It sure as hell would give you an edge, and you're going to need one. The president was getting it from the right, but you're going to be getting it from the moderate Republicans." He sneered. "We're only talking a two or three week trip, hardly more than a space shuttle flight. Come back from Mars, and you wouldn't just be the Vice-President—you'd be a hero." He said the words as if he didn't quite believe them.

"Hard to run against a hero," the President said. He pressed his hands together, then flung them out to his sides. "Moderates—trouble. But it's up to you, Dan. Think you can handle this Mars thing—make sure there's good people on the crew with you—but you gotta decide."

The Vice-President swallowed, trying for his Robert Stack look once more. He was about to say he would have to talk it over with Marilyn, but Big John would give him one of his funny looks if he said that.

"I'll consider it very seriously," he said. If Marilyn thought this was a good idea, he might have to go along with it.

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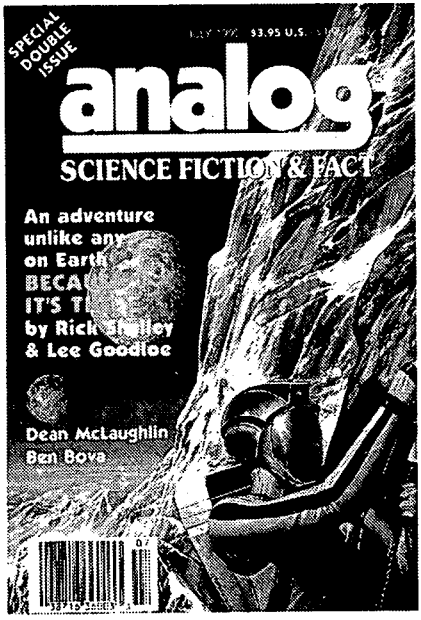

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"You do that," the former Chief of Staff said quietly.

He explained it all to his wife after dinner. There would be the months of training, but a house would be provided for him, and the family could visit him in Houston. They could even move there temporarily, but Dan wasn't about to insist on that. His son Tucker was in college, so it wouldn't much matter to him where they lived, but the move might be disruptive for Corinne and Ben.

"I can see it, in a way," he said. "If I do this, I might be unbeatable. On the other hand, it didn't work for John Glenn."

"But this is *Mars,* honey," Marilyn said. "John Glenn didn't go to Mars." She brushed back a lock of brown hair, then frowned. Dan had the sinking feeling that this whole business had already been decided. Whatever his fears about the journey, he was more afraid of facing the President and telling him he had decided not to volunteer. Besides, this space stuff might finally put an end to all the mockery. Maybe there wouldn't be any more jokes about his lousy grades and his golf trips and being on beer duty during his stint in the National Guard. Maybe that bastard Garry Trudeau would finally stop depicting him as a feather in his *Doonesbury* comic strip.

"I'd miss you a lot," Marilyn said.

"I'd miss you, too." He slipped an arm over her shoulders. "But it isn't like it's going to be one of those three-year-round-trip deals. If that's what it was, I would have said no right on the spot. They said it would be safe."

She rested her head against his chest. "Nobody could top this, you know. I doubt you'd have any challengers in the primaries afterwards, and the Democrats won't have the easy time they expected against you. Even then—"

He owed it to Marilyn. He wouldn't have gotten this far without her; in a way, it was too bad she couldn't go to Mars with him. She'd had to give up her law practice in Indiana when he was first elected to Congress, and later, her hopes of finding a job when he was running for Vice-President. She had wised him up after his election to the Senate, after the story about his colleague Tom Evans and that Parkinson babe broke; if he had listened to Marilyn in the first place, he wouldn't have been in Palm Beach with them that weekend. She had given him good advice and sacrificed plenty for him. The least he could do was make her First Lady. "What should I do?" he asked.

Marilyn drew away from him and sat up. "There's only one thing to do," she murmured. "This is too big for us to decide by ourselves, so we have to put it in God's hands. He'll show us what's right."

He folded his hands, bowed his head, and tried to summon up a prayer.

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He definitely needed the Lord's help on this one, but had the feeling that God was likely to agree with the President.

When Dan agreed to become an astronaut, it seemed that a great weight was lifted from his shoulders. The announcement brought the expected press and television coverage, along with varying reactions from stunned commentators, but the conventional wisdom was that he could probably handle his Vice-Presidential duties as well in Houston or on Mars as he could anywhere else.

There was a press conference to endure with his four fellow crew members, and the interviews, but he got through them all without any major gaffes, except for calling the moons of Mars Photos and Zenith. That snotty nerd George Will had tried to get him on some old remarks he had made about the Red Planet having canals, but Dan had muddied the waters with a bunch of memorized statistics he had mastered in the years since, along with a comment about having been under the spell of some Ray Bradbury stories. It was smart of his staff to feed him that stuff about Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles* along with the other information. Dan had not only made Will look like a bully, but had also given viewers the impression that the Vice-President actually read books.

In Houston, at least, he would not have to do many interviews, on the grounds that they might interfere with his training. This did not keep some reporters from trying to get leaked information about his progress.

There was little for them to discover. Surprisingly, the training was not nearly as rigorous as he had expected. The other American on the crew, Ashana Washington, was both a physicist and an experienced pilot; she would technically be in command of the expedition. Prince Ahmed was also a pilot, although the ship itself would be piloted automatically during the voyage. Sergei Vavilov and Kiichi Taranaga each had a string of degrees in various subjects requiring big brains, and since they, like Prince Ahmed, spoke fluent English, the Vice-President, to his great relief, would not have to try to learn a foreign language.

Basically, Dan knew, he would be little more than a passenger. Learning about the Mars vessel and its capacities was more interesting than Cabinet meetings, and messing around with the NASA computers was a little like those video games he had sometimes played with Tucker and Ben. The crew had to be in good shape, but he had always jogged and played a fair amount of tennis. He often missed Marilyn and the kids, but they had been apart for extended periods during political campaigns in the past, and their weekends together more than made up for it. He didn't have to talk to reporters, although occasionally he didn't mind posing for photographers in his NASA garb with a Robert Redford grin on his face. Once a week, some of his staffers and the President's would

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fly down to brief him on various matters, but Washington often seemed far away.

He had wondered if his fellow astronauts would take to him, since they would have to spend at least a couple of weeks in isolation with him—longer if NASA decided they should remain in a Martian base camp for a while, which they might have to do if they found anything really interesting. Within three weeks after his arrival in Houston, however, he was golfing twice a week with Kiichi, jogging in the mornings with Prince Ahmed after the Saudi's morning prayers, and playing tennis with Sergei, who, despite his small size, had one hell of a backhand.

Only Ashana had intimidated him just a little. The tall, good-looking black woman was too damned brainy and formal for him to regard her as a real babe—not that he, as a married man and a future Presidential candidate, was inclined to dwell on her apparent babe qualities anyway. Maybe Ashana thought that she was commanding this expedition for the same reason Clarence Thomas was on the Supreme Court. That was another reason to keep his distance. It wouldn't help his chances for the White House if Ashana turned into another Anita Hill.

He might have gone on being distantly polite to her, if, a month and a half into his training, he hadn't been drawn into a pick-up basketball game with a few of the NASA officers. Ashana came by, and before he knew it, she was giving him some good advice on how to improve his jump shots.

Basketball was the glue that sealed their friendship, but Dan had nearly blown it when Ashana had come to his house one weekend to meet his family and watch a game. "I should have known," he said as he settled into his chair, "that you'd be a hoop fan."

Ashana's face suddenly got very stiff. Next to her on the sofa, Marilyn was rolling her eyes and giving him her I-don't-believe-you-just-said-that look.

"Exactly why should you have known?" Ashana asked in a small but kind of scary voice.

"In your official biography—I mean, you grew up in Indiana, didn't you? Everybody's a fan there."

Ashana relaxed, but he didn't quite understand why she had laughed so hard afterward.

He admitted it to himself; if he had to be a hero to win the election, this was the way to do it. His crewmates were the real experts, so he could leave all the major decisions to them. He would, of course, do his best to be helpful. Sergei would use him as a subject in some medical experiments, and he could also help Kiichi sort his soil samples. That would be great, if they actually found life on Mars, even if it was only

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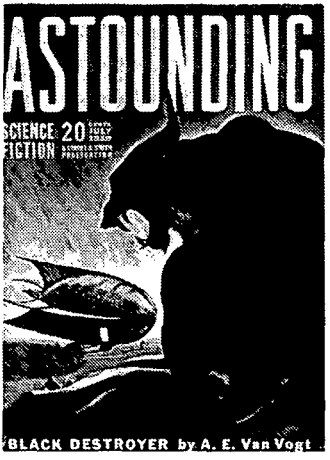

Critics mark this issue as the first "great" issue edited by John W. Campbell, Jr. It contains the first published story, "Black Destroyer," by A.E. van Vogt and the first story by Isaac Asimov to be published in **ASTOUNDING.**

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something like the mildew that sometimes showed up in the Vice-Presidential residence.

People were really getting psyched about this mission. After all the economic bad news of recent years, putting people to work on the ship, now called the *Edgar Rice Burroughs,* and its systems, as well as expanding the size of the Russian and American space stations to house those who had to work on the *Burroughs* in orbit, had given the economy a boost. Part of that was the new jobs, but most of it was simply that the country was regaining its confidence. This Mars thing would propel him into the White House on a wave of good feeling, and he would lead the country into the next century during his second term. By then, the economy would be booming along under the impetus of a revived space program. Dan wasn't exactly sure how this would happen, but would let his advisors figure that out when it was time for them to write his speeches.

It was, when he thought about it, amazing that the Mars mission had won such widespread support. There were, of course, some people who had to bitch, like those protestors who showed up at the Johnson Space Center or Cape Canaveral to protest the ship's technology, but they were the kind who panicked whenever they saw the word "fission," especially if "fusion" was sitting right next to it. A comedian on David Letterman's show had said something about how a dopehead must have thought of putting the Vice-President aboard, and so maybe they should have called the ship the *William S. Burroughs.* Dan didn't see what was so funny about that, but it didn't really matter. Most of the clippings Marilyn brought to him on her visits had optimistic words about the mission and comments from various people about his bravery and increasing maturity.

Almost before he knew it, he and his fellow astronauts were being flown to Florida, where they would spend their final days before liftoff; a space shuttle would carry them to the *Burroughs.* The President would be there, along with several ambassadors and any other dignitaries who had managed to wangle an invitation. A whole contingent of family and friends were coming in from Indiana to view the launch, which would be covered by camera teams and reporters from just about everywhere. Everything had gone basically without a hitch so far, although they were going to be late taking off for the *Burroughs;* the shuttle launch had been postponed until October, what with a few small delays on construction and testing. Still, the Mars ship and its systems had passed every test with flying colors, and this had inspired a number of articles contending, basically, that American workers had finally gotten their shit together again. More kids were deciding to take science and math courses in school. There was a rumor that *Time* magazine had decided early that Dan would have to be their Man of the Year.

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Only one dark spot marred his impending triumph. That creep Garry Trudeau was now depicting him as a feather floating inside a space helmet and referring to him as "the candidate from Mars."

The *Burroughs* wasn't exactly the kind of sleek ship Dan had seen in movies about space. Its frame held two heavily shielded habitat modules, the lander, and the Mars base assembly. The large metallic bowl that housed the pulse engine was attached to the end of the frame. The whole thing reminded him a little of a giant Tootsie Roll with a big dish at one end, but he felt confident as he floated into the crew's quarters through an open lock. The President and Barbara had wished him well, and Marilyn and the kids had looked so proud of him. If he had known that being courageous was this simple, maybe he would have tried it sooner.

Inside the large barrel of this habitat, five seats near wall screens had been bolted to what would be the floor during acceleration. He propelled himself toward a seat and strapped himself in without a qualm. The *Burroughs* circled the Earth, then took off like a dream; Dan, pressed against his seat, watched in awe as the globe on the screen shrank to the size of a marble.

The ship would take a little while to reach one g, at which point the crew could get up and move around. The *Burroughs* would continue to accelerate until they were halfway to Mars, at which point it would begin to decelerate. The faster the ship boosted, the more gravity it would have; at least that was how Dan understood the matter. Even though it might have been kind of fun to float around the *Burroughs,* he had been a bit queasy during the shuttle flight, and was just as happy that they wouldn't have to endure weightlessness during the voyage. He had heard too many stories about space sickness and the effects of weightlessness on gas; he didn't want to puke and fart all the way to Mars.

Dan had little time to glance at the viewscreens when he finally rose from his seat. The others were already messing around with the computers and setting up experiments and generally doing whatever they were supposed to do; his job now was to monitor any transmissions from Earth.

He sent back greetings, having rehearsed the words during the last few days. He didn't have anything really eloquent to say about actually being out in space at last, but a lot of astronauts weren't great talkers. When he was about to sign off, the NASA CapCom patched him through to Marilyn.

She had cut out James J. Kilpatrick's latest column to read to him. The columnist had written: "Lloyd Bentsen once said of the Vice-President, 'You're no Jack Kennedy.' This has been verified in a way Senator Bentsen could never have predicted. This man is no Jack Kennedy. Instead,

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he has donned the mantle of Columbus and the other great explorers of the past."

That was the kind of thing that could really make a guy feel great.

There was little privacy on the *Burroughs*. What with the shielding, the engine, the Mars lander they would use when they reached their destination, and the base camp assembly that would be sent to the Martian surface if NASA deemed a longer stay worthwhile, there wasn't exactly an abundance of space for the crew in the habitat modules. The next ship, which was already being built, would have the additional luxuries of a recreational module, along with separate sleeping compartments, but NASA had cut a few corners on this one.

The bathroom, toilet and shower included, was the size of a small closet; their beds, which had to be pulled out from the walls, were in the adjoining module, with no partitions. The whole place smelled like a locker room, maybe because the modules had been part of the Russian space station before being recycled for use in this mission. The food tasted even worse than some of the stuff Dan had eaten in the Deke house at DePauw.

But their comfort was not entirely overlooked; the *Burroughs* had a small library of CDs, videodiscs, and books stored on microdot. Within twenty-four hours, Dan and his companions had worked out a schedule so that each of them would have some time alone in the bed compartment to read, listen to music, or take a nap. There was no sense getting on one another's nerves during this voyage, and some solitude would ease any tensions.

Dan went to the sleeping quarters during his scheduled time on the third day out, meaning to watch one of his favorite movies, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. He could stretch out on one of the beds and still see the screen on the wall in the back. He nodded off just as Ferris Bueller, played by Matthew Broderick, was calling up his friend Cameron on the phone; he woke up to the sounds of "Twist and Shout." Matthew Broderick was gyrating on a float in the middle of a Chicago parade.

Dan had missed most of the movie. He must have been more tired than he realized, even though he didn't have as much to do as the rest of the crew: Sergei had said something about doing some medical tests on him. He looked at his watch, set on Eastern Standard Time, which they were keeping aboard ship, and noticed that it was past 8:00 P.M. He stared at the screen, not understanding why the movie was still on until he realized that the player had gone back to the beginning of the disk and started running the film again. It was Ahmed's time to use the compartment now, so why wasn't the Prince here bugging him about it? On top of that, nobody had come to get him for dinner.

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He sat up slowly. A weird feeling came over him, a little like the nervousness he had felt before calling his father about trying to get into the Guard. He got to his feet and climbed the ladder through the passageway that connected this module to the next.

The hatch at the end of the short passage was open as he came up. His shipmates were slumped over the table where they usually ate, their faces in their trays. Dan crept toward them, wondering if this was some kind of joke. "Okay, guys," he said, "you can cut it out now." They were awfully still, and Sergei had written something on the table in Cyrillic letters with his fingers and some gravy. "Okay, you faked me out. Come on." Dan stopped behind Kiichi and nudged him, then saw that the Japanese had stopped breathing. Very slowly, he moved around the table, taking each person's pulse in turn. The arms were flaccid, the bodies cold.

"Oh, my God," he said. "Oh, my God." He sank to the floor, covered his face with his hands, and sat there for a long time until a voice called out to him from the com.

"Houston to *Burroughs*. Houston to *Burroughs*." He got up and stumbled toward the com. "Come in, *Burroughs*." He sat down and turned on the com screen.

Sallie Werfel, the CapCom, stared out at him from the screen.

"They're dead," he blurted out. "They're all dead." Not until after he had said it did he remember that NASA had planned a live broadcast for that evening. "Oh, my God."

Sallie gazed back at him with a big smile on her face; it would take a while for his words to reach her, since signals had to work harder to get through all that space. Then her smile disappeared, and she was suddenly shouting to somebody else before turning to the screen once more.

"We're off the air," she said. "All right, what the hell do you mean about—"

"They're all dead," he replied. "At the table. Turn on the cameras and take a look. Sergei wrote something next to his tray, but it's in Russian."

Sallie was whispering to a man near her. Some more time passed. "All right, Dan," she said very quietly. "I want you to stay right where you are for the moment. We've got the cameras on the others now. You're absolutely sure they're, uh, gone."

"Yeah."

A few more minutes passed. "We're looking at Sergei's message. A couple of our people here know Russian, so we should have a translation in just a little bit. While we're waiting, I want to know exactly what you were doing during the last few hours."

"Not much," he said. "I mean, it was my turn for some private time—we had, like, a schedule for times to be alone, you know? So I went to the other

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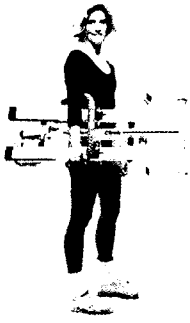

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module thinking I'd catch a movie." He was about to say he had been watching *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, but thought better of it. "What I remember is that Ashana was on the treadmill working out, and Sergei and Ahmed were checking some numbers or something. Kiichi was in the can—er, bathroom. I fell asleep, and when I woke up and looked at the time, it was past dinner. Then I came out and—" He swallowed hard. "Oh, my God." He waited.

"Take it easy, Dan," she said finally. "We're opening up a line to the White House right now."

An alien, he thought. Some creepy blob thing, the kind of creature they showed in old sci-fi movies, had somehow found its way aboard the ship. He imagined it oozing out to kill his companions during dinner, then concealing itself somewhere aboard the *Burroughs* to wait for him. Except that it wouldn't find too many places it could hide in the crew's quarters. Maybe the alien was concealed in the Mars lander by now, waiting for him. He shuddered. It couldn't be an alien. There wasn't any way for one to get aboard.

"We've got a translation," Sallie was saying. Dan forced his attention back to the screen. "We know what Sergei wrote." Her eyes glistened; he held his breath. "Not the food. Fever. Feels like flu."

"What?" He waited.

"Flu. Influenza." She lifted a hand to her temples. "He's telling us it wasn't anything in the food, that it felt as if they were coming down with something."

Everything had happened awfully fast. The whole business might be some sort of weird assassination attempt; maybe someone had figured out a way to poison the main module's air system. It was pure chance that he had not been sitting there with the others. But why would anyone want to assassinate him? Only the Democrats had anything to gain from that, and they had so many loose cannons that somebody would have leaked such a plot by now.

He didn't know whether to be relieved or not when Sallie contacted him an hour later and gave him NASA's hypothesis. They suspected that his comrades had been the victims of an extremely virulent but short-lived virus—virulent because the others had died so quickly, and short-lived because Dan, in the same module breathing the same air, was still alive. They had come up with this explanation after consulting with the Russians, who had admitted that milder viruses had occasionally afflicted their cosmonauts. The closed ecologies of their modules had never been perfect. What that meant was that things could get kind of scuzzy in there.

The next order of business was to dispose of the bodies. Dan put on his

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spacesuit and tried not to look at the foodstained faces of his dead comrades as he dragged them one by one into the airlock.

They deserved a prayer. The only ones he knew were Christian prayers, but maybe Kiichi and Ahmed wouldn't mind, and he suspected Sergei was more religious than he let on. He whispered the Lord's Prayer, and then another he had often used at prayer breakfasts. Too late, he realized that a prayer said at meals might not be the most appropriate thing, given that his companions had died over their chow.

He looked up from the bodies as the outside door slid slowly open to reveal the blackness of space. His comrades deserved a few more words before he consigned them to the darkness.

"You guys," he whispered, "you were some of the best friends I ever had. You were definitely the smartest."

It took a while to get the bodies outside. As he watched them drift away from the ship, tears rose to his eyes. He was really going to miss them.

Sallie contacted Dan an hour before the President was to address the nation and the world. The most important thing now was for Dan to seem in control of himself when it was time for his own broadcast. The NASA scientists were fairly certain that Dan wouldn't suffer the fate of the others; there was only a slight chance that the mysterious virus would reappear to infect him. He didn't find this very consoling, since there had been only a slight chance of such a thing happening in the first place.

"Do me a favor, Sallie," Dan said. "If I do kick off, don't let the media have tapes of it or anything. I mean, I don't want Marilyn and my kids watching that stuff on CNN or something." He waited. The time for round-trip signals was growing longer.

"You got it, Dano."

The President made his announcement, and Dan went on an hour later to show that he was still able to function. He had no prepared speech, but the most important thing was to look calm and not hysterical. He succeeded in that, mostly because he felt too stunned and empty to crack up in front of the hundreds of millions who would be viewing him from Earth.

Sallie spoke to him after his appearance. Ashana Washington's parents and brother had already retained counsel, and there was talk of massive lawsuits. He might have known that the lawyers would get in on this immediately.

"The most important thing now," Sallie said, "is to bring you home as fast as possible. You'll reach your destination four days from now." She narrowed her eyes. "The *Burroughs* is already programmed to orbit Mars automatically, so all we have to do is let it swing around and head back to Earth. You can get back in—"

"I'm not going to land?" he asked, and waited even longer.

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Sallie sat up. "Land?"

"I want to land, Sallie. Don't you understand? I have to now. The others would have expected me to—I've got to do it for them." He searched for another phrase. "It means they won't have died in vain. I can do it—you can program the lander, and I can go down to the surface. Maybe I can't do the experiments and stuff they were going to, but I can set up the cameras and bring back soil samples. It wouldn't be right not to try. And if I'm going to die, I might as well die doing something."

He waited for his words to reach her. "Dan," she said at last, "you surprise me."

It would probably surprise the hell out of the President, too. "I've got to do it, Sallie." He frowned, struggling with the effort of all this thinking. "Look, if I land, it'll inspire the world to bigger and better space triumphs. We'll get that bigger space station built and the more advanced ships, too. But if you just bring me back, all the nuts will start whining again about what a waste all this was and how four people died for nothing." He waited.

"I'll do what I can, Dan." She shook her head. "I don't have much to say about this, but I can speak up for you. In the end, though, it's probably going to be up to the President."

"Then put me through to him now."

He hashed it out with the President in the slow motion of radio delay, listened to the objections, and replied by invoking the memory of his dead comrades. When the President, looking tense and even more hyper than usual, signed off by saying he would have to consult with his advisors, Dan was certain he had won. He felt no surprise when word came twelve hours later that he would be allowed to undertake the landing.

After all, if the President didn't let him go ahead, it was like admitting publicly that he had put an incompetent without adequate training aboard the *Burroughs*. The President, having finally salvaged his place in history, wasn't about to go down in the record books as a doofus.

David Bowie was singing about Major Tom and Ground Control. Kiichi had been a David Bowie fan, so a lot of Bowie's music, everything from his Ziggy Stardust phase up through Tin Machine, was in the *Burroughs*'s music collection. Dan had never been into David Bowie, who struck him as being kind of fruity, but now he felt as if he understood this particular song.

Sometimes, during his work with the President's Council on Space, Dan had wondered why some early astronauts had gotten kind of flaky after returning to Earth. These were macho test pilot guys, not the kind of men anyone would expect to get mystical or weirded out. But as he moved around the ship, which was usually silent except for the low throbbing

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hum of the engine and an occasional beep from the consoles, he was beginning to feel a bit odd himself, as if his mind had somehow moved outside of his body.

He had never thought all that much about God. He had, of course, never doubted that God was out there going about His business; he had simply never thought about the Lord that much, except when he was in church or saying a prayer. When he was a boy, he had imagined a God something like his grandfather Pulliam, an angry old man ready to smite all those liberal Democrats, Communists, and other forces of darkness. Later on, when he was older and more mature, God had seemed more like a sort of basketball coach or golf pro.

Now, when he gazed at the image of Mars on his screen, a rust-red dot surrounded by blackness, he had the strangest feeling that he had never really understood the Lord at all. God had created all this, the planets and the space between them and the stars that were so far away he could not even comprehend the distance. God, in some ways, was a lot like the NASA computers, but there was even more to Him than that. Dan wasn't quite sure how to put it; things like that were hard to explain. He supposed that was what it meant to be mystical—having weird feelings you couldn't quite put into words. And faith was believing what no one in his right mind would believe even though it was true.

NASA kept him busy during his waking hours programming the Mars lander and checking out its systems. After supper, he usually worked on his speech, with some suggestions NASA was passing along from his speechwriters. They had given him another speech earlier, but he couldn't use that one now. With what had happened, this one would have to be really inspiring.

Yet he still had his moments of solitude, the times when he felt, for the first time in his life, what it was like to be utterly alone. He couldn't actually be alone, he supposed, since God had to be somewhere in the vicinity, but there were times when it seemed that the emptiness of space had seeped into him.

Mars swelled until it filled the screen, and then his ship was falling around the planet. There was no way to avoid weightlessness now; the *Burroughs* had begun to decelerate after the halfway point of the journey, and its engine had finally shut down. Dan put on his spacesuit and floated through the tunnel that connected the crew's quarters with the module holding the base assembly. He wouldn't be setting up a Mars base, though, since NASA didn't want him fooling around down there for very long. He entered the last module, which held the lander.

He pressed his hand against the lander's door; it slid open. The lander had food, a small lavatory, and equipment for experiments. There was

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even a Mars rover on board so that he could ride around on the surface. He wouldn't be doing much, though, except for shooting a bunch of stuff with the cameras and gathering soil samples. The important thing was to land, make his speech, mess around for a little while, catch some shut-eye, and then get back to the *Burroughs*.

He strapped himself into one of the chairs. The four empty seats made him feel as if the ghosts of the others were with him. NASA had allowed each of the astronauts to bring along a small personal possession to take down to the Martian surface, and Dan had his companions' choices with him in the lander. Ahmed had brought a Koran, Kiichi a vintage Louisville Slugger with Joe DiMaggio's signature engraved on it, Sergei a set of nested Russian dolls, and Ashana a pair of Nikes personally autographed by Michael Jordan. A lump rose in his throat.

The doors to the outside were opening; he tensed. The President had spoken to him just a couple of hours ago, telling him that everyone in the world would be waiting for his first transmission from the surface. In spite of the tragedy, Dan's determination to carry out the landing had inspired everybody in the country. Having come so far, humankind would not be discouraged by this setback; the Vice-President had shown the way. Construction of the next ship was moving along; it would probably be spaceworthy by spring, and a follow-up Mars mission would give an even bigger boost to Dan's candidacy. At this point, he would probably carry all the states, and even D.C., in the general election.

"Asteroids," the President had said. "Lotta resources there. Just get one of those things in Earth orbit, where we can go into, uh, a mining mode, and supply-side economics can work." It was nice for Dan to think that, when he finally became President, things might be moving along so well that he'd have plenty of time for golf, the way Eisenhower had.

The lander glided forward toward the new world below.

Mars filled his screen. Dan, pressed against his seat, braced himself. He had known what to expect; his training had included maneuvers with a model of the Mars rover in areas much like the Martian surface. Yet actually seeing it this close up still awed him. It looked, he thought, like the biggest sand trap in the universe.

His chair trembled under him as he landed. Dan waited, wanting to make sure everything was all right before he got up. Time to contact Earth, but in the excitement of actually being on Mars, he had forgotten what he was supposed to say.

He cleared his throat. "Guys," he said, "I'm down." That ought to do the job.

Over four minutes passed before he heard what sounded like cheers at the other end. Sallie was saying something, but he couldn't make out

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the words. By then, he was rummaging through the compartments of his spacesuit looking for the cards that held his speech.

"—all ecstatic," Sallie's voice said. "Congratulations, and God bless you—you don't know how much—"

He sighed, realizing at last that he had forgotten the cards. He might have known that, during the most important moment of his life, he would have to ad lib.

Dan waited in the small airlock until the door slid open. Above him was the pinkish-red sky of an alien world. A rust-colored barren landscape stretched to the horizon, which, he noticed, seemed closer than it should be, then he remembered that Mars was smaller than Earth. He felt a lot lighter, too, since Mars, being a smaller place, didn't have as much gravity.

He made his way down the ladder to the surface, then inhaled slowly. "Whoa," he said aloud, overcome with awe at the immensity of this accomplishment and sorrow that his dead comrades could not share the moment with him. "Jeez." He pressed his lips together, suddenly realizing that history would record man's first words on the surface of Mars as "Whoa" and "Jeez."

"Well, here I am," he said, knowing he would have to wing it. "I almost can't believe I'm here. Man, if anybody had told me when I was a kid that I'd go to Mars, I would have thought—" He paused. "Anyway, the thing is, I wish the others were here with me, because they're the ones who really deserved to make this trip. What I mean is, I'm really going to miss them, but I can tell you all I'm not ever going to forget them. It's why I'm here, because of them. In other words, I figured I had to come down and stand here for them." He remembered that he was supposed to plant the United Nations flag about now, and took the pole out from under his arm. "Now we'll go forward." The words he had planned to say at this point were something like that. "And someday, other people will come here and turn into Martians." Dan cleared his throat. "Guess I'll show you around a little now."

He scanned the landscape with a camera, then went back to the lander. By then, the President had given him his congratulations, and Marilyn had gotten on to talk to him after that. He was happy to hear his wife's voice, even though, what with having to wait a few minutes until she heard him and could reply, it wasn't actually possible to have what he would call a real conversation. This far from Earth, the signals had to work even harder to reach him.

The rover had been lowered from another side of the lander on a platform. Since about all he could do was take pictures and gather soil

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samples, NASA wanted him to drive around and take them in different places. They didn't want him to go too far or take any unnecessary risks, and maybe, now that he'd given a speech of sorts, he could let the images of the Martian surface speak for themselves.

He rode around, careful not to drive too fast since there were some nasty-looking rocks and rims of small craters nearby, until the orange sky grew darker. By the time he got back to the lander with his samples, the sky was nearly black and the sun a bright swirl on the horizon.

I actually got here, he thought, then remembered the others with a pang.

He slept well, then got up to say his farewells to the Red Planet—although Rusty Planet might be a better name for it. Another ride, some more pictures and samples, and he was ready to go. He hoped the NASA scientists weren't too unhappy with his answers to their questions about what unusual things he might have observed. Hell, *everything* seemed pretty unusual here, when he stopped to think about it.

He went inside, then strapped in. "Ready to go," he said. There were just a couple of buttons to push, and he had practiced a lot during the last days aboard the *Burroughs* to be sure he didn't make a mistake. He pressed one, waited for it to light up, then hit the next. For a few moments, he wondered why he couldn't feel the lander taking off, then realized that it wasn't moving.

"Uh, Mars to Houston," he said, then waited until he heard Sallie's voice respond. "I hate to say this, but I'm not going anywhere. Should I hit those whosits again, or what?"

Nearly ten minutes later, he heard Sallie's reply. Her first word was, "Shit."

No matter how many times he activated the controls, nothing happened. Mission Control had various theories about what might be wrong, none of which were doing him any good. Gradually it dawned on him that he might be stranded. Twenty-four hours after he reached that conclusion, Sallie confirmed it. They could not pinpoint the problem at that distance. They did not want to take any risks with the lander. He was reminded of which buttons to push in order to bring down the Mars base assembly.

It could have been worse, he told himself. There were enough provisions in the lander alone to last him more than a month, since his companions weren't there to share them. With the supplies the base assembly had, he could survive until a rescue mission arrived.

There would be such a mission. The President assured him of that, as did Sallie. Another ship would be on its way to him within a few months.

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The wonderful thing was that his mission, despite the tragedy, was in its own way a success, even if he wasn't in the best position to appreciate that fact. A man had made it to Mars and was now on its surface, and the fate of his fellow astronauts had only temporarily stemmed the rising tide of optimism and hope. Humankind would return to the Moon and reach out to the other planets. Dan, who had insisted on landing instead of turning back, would be remembered by future generations of space explorers.

How his present predicament might affect the elections was not discussed. The President had said something vague about getting him back there in time for the convention. Now that Dan was a true hero, it didn't look as though there would be any opposition in the Republican primaries anyway.

Dan tried to feel comforted by this, but the campaign, and everything else, seemed awfully far away.

A distant object shaped like a shuttlecock dropped toward the cratered plain. Its engines fired; the object landed two kilometers away.

Dan sighed with relief at the sight of the base assembly. He had been worrying that something might go wrong at this point; one disadvantage of being a hero was that sometimes it required you to be dead. Now he would be safe, and could keep busy making observations, watching movies, working out, and in general keeping himself together until the rescue mission arrived. It was sort of depressing to know he'd miss Thanksgiving and Christmas, although fortunately there were some turkey dinners among the provisions, and Mission Control had promised to sing carols for him.

He climbed into the rover and started toward the barrels of the base assembly; he'd check it out first, then come back another time to load up whatever he might need from the lander. His staff had promised to transmit the text for the official announcement of his candidacy in a few days, and he supposed they would want him to make some speeches from Mars later, during the primaries. Maybe being on Mars, whatever the disadvantages, was better than having to trudge through New Hampshire.

He had to admit it; life in the somewhat more spacious quarters of the Mars base wasn't too bad in some ways. He was getting used to the desolate orange landscape and the way the sun set so suddenly. There were movies and records enough to keep him occupied, although he was beginning to see that there were limits to how many times he could watch some movies, even ones as great as *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.

But there were times when the solitude, even with all the messages

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NASA was relaying from Earth, really got to him. There wasn't a whole lot a guy could do all alone, except for stuff it was better not to think about too much. He had spoken to Marilyn and the kids a couple of times, but having to speak and then wait long minutes for the response made him realize how far he was from everything he knew.

Maybe things would pick up when he really got into his campaign. There was plenty he could do, even out here. His staff was already trying to set him up for a *Nightline* appearance, which would probably have to be taped so that the delay between Ted Koppel's questions and his answers could be deleted. His staff should be transmitting the text for the official announcement of his candidacy any day now.

Dan had finished struggling into his spacesuit and was about to put on his helmet when the com started beeping at him. Maybe his speechwriters had finally gotten their act together. He sat down and turned on the screen.

The President's face stared out at him. "Uh, hello, Mr. President," Dan said. "I was just about to take a drive over to the lander—there's some stuff I want to move here."

"I don't know how to tell you this, Dan," the President said. "Something's gone, well, a bit awry. Might have known the Democrats would think of some devious—see, we're going to have to postpone your announcement for a while."

"But why?"

He waited a long time for the President's answer. "The Democrats—they're saying you have to be on Earth to make your announcement. Somebody found some loophole or other in the law, and they're arguing that you can't declare and run for president while you're on Mars. Got our guys working on it—think they can beat those bastards in court—but by the time they do, it may be too late to file and get you on primary ballots. Could try to get write-ins, but the rules are, uh, different in every state."

Dan tried to recall if there was something in the law the Democrats could use to pull a stunt like this. He couldn't think of anything, but then he hadn't been exactly the biggest brain in law school. Maybe the Democrats would drag out John Glenn, however old he was, to run this time. They'd probably use Ashana's family in the campaign, too; they had plenty of reason to be pissed off at the Administration.

"You said I could get back by the convention," Dan murmured. "I mean, aren't the delegates free to switch their votes if they want?"

The minutes passed. "Well, you're right on the money there, and no question they'd turn to you, but—see, NASA's got sort of a little problem with the new ship. Nothing for you to worry about, just some bitty technical thing they can definitely iron out, but they're certain they can have you back here next fall."

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Dan was beginning to see more problems. The Democrats might use his predicament against the Republicans. They would say he wouldn't be stranded there if the Administration had thought more about real science and space exploration and less about politics and publicity stunts, if they hadn't been rushing to put him on another planet. He wouldn't be on the campaign trail to inspire people and to invoke the names of his comrades; he would be only a distant voice and grainy image from Mars. The whole business might turn into as big a bummer as the end of the Gulf War.

"What are we going to do?" Dan asked.

When the President replied, he said, "Well, there's a lotta sentiment here to make Marilyn our candidate."

That figured. The idea was so perfect that Dan was surprised he hadn't thought of it himself. The Democrats would look mean-spirited slinging mud at a hero's wife, one waiting and praying for her husband to return safely.

"All I can say," Dan said quietly, "is that she has my full support."

Dan finished loading the rover, climbed in and drove slowly toward the scattered Tootsie Rolls of his base. He had not had to talk to Marilyn very long to convince her to run; in fact, he had expected her to object a lot more to the idea. She would make a pretty good president, though—maybe a better one than he would have been.

He had packed up the personal items of his comrades—Ashana's Nikes, Ahmed's Koran, Kiichi's bat, and Sergei's dolls—feeling that he wanted his dead friends' things with him. He had also brought his golf balls and his favorite wood. The club, which had a persimmon head, had cost him a pretty penny, but he liked a driver with a solid hardwood head.

An inspiration came to him. He stopped the rover, climbed down, then took out one of his balls and the wood. Stepping over a small crater, he set down the ball; then gripped his club. Getting in a smooth swing was going to be rough with his spacesuit on, but he thought he could manage it. Alan Shepard might be the first guy to tee off on the Moon, but Dan would be the first to do so on another planet.

He swung his club and knew the head's sweet spot had met the ball. The small white orb arched above the orange cratered landscape and soared toward the distant pink sky. ●

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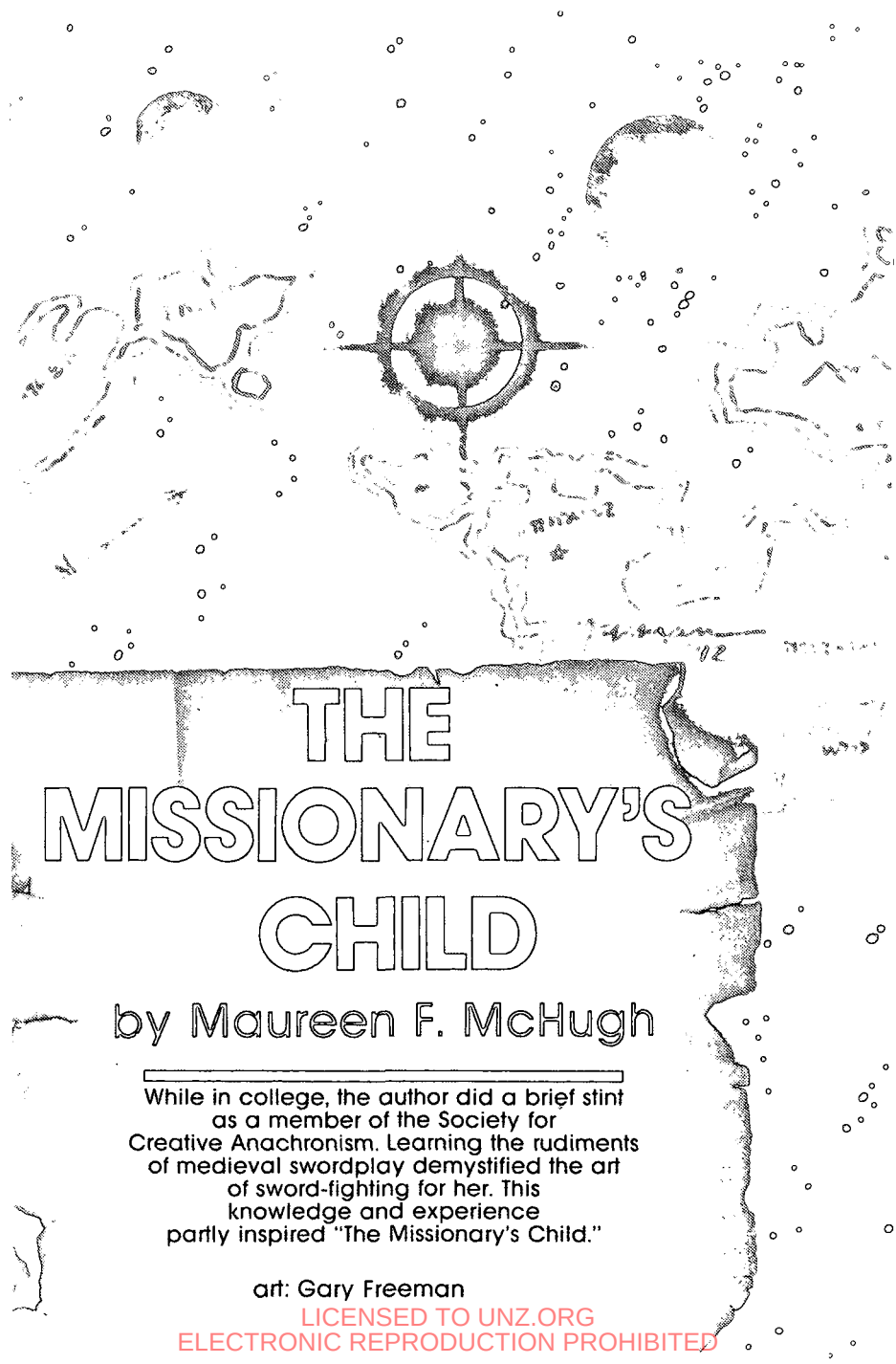

THE MISSIONARY'S CHILD

by Maureen F. McHugh

While in college, the author did a brief stint as a member of the Society for Creative Anachronism. Learning the rudiments of medieval swordplay demystified the art of sword-fighting for her. This knowledge and experience partly inspired "The Missionary's Child."

art: Gary Freeman

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"Are you blind?" the woman asks.

I'm looking right at her. "No," I say, "I'm foreign."

Affronted, the woman straightens up in a swirl of rose-colored robe and chouli scent, clutching her veil. Here in the islands, they don't see very many blond-haired, blue-eyed barbarians; people have asked me if I can see normally, if all northerners are blue-eyed. But this is the first time someone has ever asked me that. Maybe she thinks that my eyes are filmed, like the milky-white of old people.

She thought I was begging—I must look pretty tattered. I should have said yes, then I could go get something to drink, get out of the sun. I'm sitting down by the water. I'm broke, and I've been hungry for awhile, and I'm listless and a little stupid from the heat and lack of food. I feel fifty instead of thirty-one.

I should go back to the hiring area, wait around with a couple of other thugs for some sort of nasty work. I should oil my sword. It's a waste of time; no one needs a mercenary here, the Celestial Prince doesn't hire foreigners in his army.

But I don't want to go back. Up in the market, some yammerhead had been rattling on about our Cousins from the stars. The Cousins haven't come to the islands in any numbers yet, and I'll wager he's never met any. Listening to this stonker gave me a headache. Wouldn't he be surprised if he knew that the Cousins think of us all about the way the woman who asked me if I was blind thinks of me. They think that we're barbarians. They think that we're stupid because we call what they do magic instead of *science*. Or they feel sorry for us.

I know better than thinking bitter; time to head back to the market, see if anybody will hire a tokking foreigner to dig ditches or something.

But I sit, my head aching with hunger and heat, too stupid to do anything about it. And I'm still sitting there a dine later, the sun is still high in the sky baked the color of celedon. Not awake, not asleep.

I'm going to have to start selling my gear, the slow road to starvation.

I open my eyes and watch a ship come in on the deep green sea. It has red eyes rimmed in violet and violet sails; from far away, I can see a person wearing dark clothes that are all of one piece. A Cousin, standing at the prow. On the boathouse there is a light, star-magic, like a third eye, blind and white. Here in the islands, when you see Cousins, they are with the rich and the powerful.

What would the Cousin think if I spoke a little of his/her language? I only remember a few phrases. "Hello," "My name is," and a phrase from my lessons, "Husband and wife Larkin have three children, a boy and two girls." Would the Cousin be curious enough to take me aboard? Recognize the debt for what the Cousins did to my kin, help me get back to the mainland?

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The ship docks, three guildmen and a Cousin disembark, and come down the quay. Southerners will stare at any foreigner, but they stare double at a Cousin, and who can blame them? The Cousin is a woman, with her hair uncovered, dressed like a man, but not looking like a man, no. That amuses me. Southern women pull their veils around their mouths and stop to watch.

She comes down the quay with studied indifference. I can understand that; what does one do when people stare day after day? Pretend not to notice.

She is tall, taller than me, but Cousins are usually tall, and I'm shorter than many men. She looks up directly at me while I am smiling, by chance. The length of a man between us. I can see that she has light eyes.

"Hello," I say in the trade language of the Cousins. The word just pops out.

It stops her, though, like a roped stabros calf. "Hello," she says, in the same tongue. Consternation among the guildmen; two in dark red and one in green, all with shaven heads dull with the graphite sheen of stubble. "You speak lingua?" she says.

"A little," I say.

Then she rattles on, asking me something, "where da-da da-da da."

I shrug. Search my memory. My lessons in lingua were a lifetime ago; I remember almost nothing. Something comes to me that I often said in class: "I don't understand," I say, "I speak little."

"Where did you learn?" she says in Suhkhra, the language of the southerners. "Starport?"

"Up north." No real answer. Already I'm sorry I spoke. Bad *enough* to be a tokking foreigner; worse to be a spectacle. And my head aches, and I am tired from three days' lack of food.

"Did you work at the port?" she asks, probing.

"No," I say. Flat.

She frowns. Then, like a boat before bad winds, she comes across in another direction. She speaks in my own language, the language of home. "What is your name?" She is careful and stilted in that one phrase.

"Jahn," I say, probably the commonest name among northern men. "What is yours?" I ask, without regard for courtesy.

"Sulia," she says. "Jahn, what kin-kind?"

"My kin are all dead," I say, "Jahn no-kin-kind."

But she shakes her head. "I'm sorry," she says in Suhkhra, "I don't understand. I speak very little Krerjian. What did you say your name was?"

"Jahn Sckarline," I say. And then, in my own tongue, "Go away." Because I am tired of her, tired of everything, tired of starving.

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She isn't listening, and probably doesn't understand anyway. "Sckarline," she says. "I thought everyone from Sckarline—"

"Is dead," I say. "Thank you, Cousin. I am pleased you keep my kinname." It's awkward to say in Suhkra. The Suhkra aren't good at irony anyway.

"Sulia Cousin," one of the guildmen says deferentially, "they are waiting for us."

She shakes him off. "I know about the settlement at Sckarline," she says to me. "You're a mission boy. You have an education. Why don't you work at a port?"

"And live in a *ghetto?*" The word comes back to me in her trade lingua. "With the other *natives?*"

"Isn't it better to get a tech job than to live like this?" she asks.

Better than a shantytown, I think, huddled together while the starships come screaming overhead, making one's teeth ache and one's goods rattle?

I look at her, she looks at me. I search my memory for the words in lingua, but my mind isn't sharp and it was too long ago. "Go away," I finally say in Suhkhra, "people are waiting."

She stands there hesitant, but the guildman does not. He strides forward and smacks me hard in the side of my head for my disrespect. I know better than to defend myself. Oh, Heth, my poor head! Southerners are a bad lot, they have no concept of a freeman.

So, having been knocked over, I stay still, with my nose near the stones, waiting to see if he'll hit me again, smelling dust, and sea, and the smell of myself, which is probably very distasteful to everyone else.

He crouches down, and I wait to be smacked again, empty-headed. But it isn't him, it's her. "What are you doing here?" she asks. She probably means how did you come here, but I find myself wondering, what am I doing here? Looking for work. Trying to get passage home. But home is gone, should never have existed in the first place.

What does any person do in a lifetime? I give her an answer out of the Proverbs. "Putting off death," I say. "Go away, before you complicate my task—you people have done enough to me."

She looks unhappy. Cousins are like that, a sentimental people. "If I could help you, I would," she says.

"I know," I say, "but your help would make me *need* you. And then I would be just one more local on one more backward world." Everywhere the Cousins go across the sky, it's the same. Wanji used to tell us about her people, about the Cousins. About other worlds like ours. Where two cultures meet, she said, one of them usually gives way.

The Cousin searches through her pockets, puts a coin, a rectangular silver piece, in the dust. I wait, not moving, until they go on.

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I pick up the coin. A proud person would throw it after her. I'm not proud, I'm hungry. I take it.

In the market, it's rabbit and duck day—kids herding ducks with long switches, cages of rabbits for sale, hanging next to that cheap old staple, thekla lizard drying in strips. I dodge past tallgrass poles with craken-dyed cloth hanging startling yellow, and cut through between two vegetable stands. Next to the hiring area, they're grilling stabos jerky on sticks, and selling pineapple slices dipped in saltwater to make them sweeter.

I use the Cousin's silver to buy noodles and red peanut paste, spicy with proyakapiti, and I eat slowly. I'm three days empty of food, and if I eat too fast, I'll be sick. I learned about going without food during a campaign, when I first started soldiering. On the long walk to Bashtoy. I know all about the different kinds of hunger; the first sharp stabs of appetite, then the strong hunger, how your stomach hurts after awhile, and then how you forget, and then how hunger comes back, like swollen joints in an old woman. And how it wears you down, how you become tired and stupid, and how then finally it leaves you altogether, and your jaw bone softens until your teeth rock in their sockets, and you have been hungry so long you don't know what it means anymore.

The yammerhead is on the other side of the hiring area, still going on about how the guilds monopolize the Cousins. How the guilds were nothing until ten years ago, when the Cousins came and brought magic, and then no one could trade without permission of the guild. I close my eyes, feeling sleepy after food, and I can see the place where I grew up. I was born in Sckarline, a magic town. I remember the white houses, the power station where Ayuedesh taught boys to cook stabos manure and get swamp air from it, then turned that into power that sang through copper and made light. At night, we had light for three or four dine after sunset. Phrases in the lingua the Cousins speak, *Appropriate Technology*.

I am lost in Sckarline, looking for my mother, for kin. I see Trevin, and I follow him. He's way ahead, in leggings, in dark blue with fur on his shoulders. But the way he leads me is wrong, the buildings are burned, just blackened crossbeams jutting up, he is leading me toward—

"I'm looking for a musician." I jerk awake.

A flat-faced southerner waiting for hire says, "Musicians are over there." People who wait here are like me, looking for anything.

A portly man with a wine-colored robe says, "I'm looking for a musician who knows a little about swords."

"What kind of musician?" I ask. I always talk quietly, it's a failing, and the portly man doesn't hear me. He cocks his head.

"What kind of musician?" the flat-faced southerner repeats.

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"Doesn't matter." The portly man shrugs, hawks so loudly it sounds as if he's clearing his tokking head, and spits.

Tokking southerners. They spit all the time, it drives me crazy. I hear them clear their throat, and I cringe and start looking to step out of the way. Heth knows I'm not squeamish, but they *all* do it, men, women, children.

"Sikha," the portly man offers. A sikha is a kind of southern lute, only they pick the strings on the neck as well as the ones on the body.

"How about flute?" I offer.

"Flute?" the portly man says. His robe is of good quality, but stained, and he has a negligent air. The robe gapes open to the belted waist, showing his smooth chest and the soft flab like breasts. "You play the flute, northerner?"

No, I want to say, I just wanted to help us think of some instruments. Patience. "Yes," I say, "I play the flute."

"Let's hear you."

So I dig out my wooden flute and make pretty sounds. He waves his hands and says, "How good are you with a sword?"

I dig into my pack and pull my cloak out of the bottom. It's crushed and wrinkled, people don't wear cloaks much in the south, but I spread it out so that he can see the badge on the breast: a white mountain against a red background. The survivors of the March to Bashtoy got them—that, and sixty gold coins. The sixty gold coins have been gone for a couple of years, but the badge is still on the cloak.

People murmur. The portly man doesn't know badges, he's not a fighter, but the flat-faced southerner does, and it shows in the sudden respect in his face, and that ends any question of my swordplay—which is fine because, badge or no badge, I'm only mediocre at swordplay. I'm just not tall enough or big enough.

Surviving a campaign is as much a matter of luck and cleverness as skill with a sword, anyway.

But that's why Barok hires me to play flute at his party.

He offers me twenty in silver, which is too much money. He pays me five right away. He must want me to be a bodyguard, and that means that he thinks that he'll *need* one. I like guard duty, or, better than that, something like being a sailor. But I didn't realize until I jumped ship that, here in the Islands, not just *anybody* can be a sailor. I shouldn't take this job, it sounds like trouble, but I've got to do something.

All boat trade except local fishing is controlled by the four Navigation Orders, all the Cousins's magic by the two Metaphysical Orders. I don't pay much attention to Magic; I'm just a whistler, a mercenary. I have three spells myself (but simple ones), that Ayuedesh Engineer, the old

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Cousin, wired into my skull when we knew that Scathalos High-on was going to attack Sckarline. A lot of good spells did us in the end, with all of two twenties of us and four Cousins, everybody in Sckarline who could fight at all, against the Scathalos High-on, Kin-leader's army.

I am supposed to report my spells to the Metaphysical Orders, but I'm not *that* stupid. Just stupid enough to come *here*.

A man who hires a sword to play music must have unusual parties, and I wait to hear what he wants of me.

"You'll need better clothes," he says. "And bathe, would you?"

I promise to meet him in the market in three dine or so. And then I finger the coppers left from the Cousin's silver and the five silver coins he's given me. First I go to the bath house, and I pay for a private bath. I hate bath houses. It is not, as the southerners all think, that northerners hate to bathe; I just find bath houses . . . uncomfortable. Even in a private room, I strip furtively, keeping my back to the door. But Heth, it is good to be clean, to not itch! I even wash my clothes, wring them out as best I can. The water runs black, and I have to put on wet clothes, but I imagine they'll dry fast enough.

Back at the market, I find a stall that sells used clothes. I go through piles until I find a black jacket with a high neck, fairly clean. And I have my hair trimmed.

I use much of my three dine and about half of the Cousin's silver, but when the time comes, I am back at the hiring area, cleaner, neater, with Barok's five silver still in my pocket, and ready to earn the other fifteen silver. And I don't wait long for my employer, who looks me over and spits, by which he means I have passed inspection.

I assume from his lavish way with silver and his manner that we will head to one of the better parts of town. After all, a lot of silver went into the feeding of that smooth belly and flacid chest. But we head down toward where the river meets the ocean. It's a wide, tame river, enclosed by stone walls and arched—so they claim—by fourteen stone bridges. But this far down, all poor. The closer we get, the more rank it smells. We go down a stone stairs to the water, past women washing clothes, and out onto a small city of permanently moored boats.

The sunbleached boats have eyes painted on the prows, even though they never go anywhere. They're homes to families, each living the length of my arm from the next, all piled up together with brown dusty chickens, laundry flapping, brown children running from boat to boat, wearing nothing but a yellow gourd on a rope tied around their waist (if they fall overboard, the gourd floats, holding them up until some adult can fish them out of the water).

I've never been out here before; it's a maze, and it would be worth my life to step on these boats alone. Even walking with Barok, I feel the

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men's eyes follow me with hard gazes. We cross from boat to boat, they rise and fall under our feet. The boats bob, the green river stinks of garbage and rotting fish, and my poor head swirls a bit. I've been here two and half years, I speak the language, but only southerners can live piled up on top of each other this way.

Out near where the middle is kept clear for river traffic, we climb a ramp up onto a larger boat, maybe the length of five men head to foot, the home of Barok. A tiny brown woman wrapped in blue is shoving charcoal into a tampis jar, a jar with a place in the bottom to put fuel to heat the stuff cooking in the top. It's a big tampis jar. I smell meat; there's smooth creamy yogurt in a blue and white bowl next to her. I'm hungry again. She glances up, and looks back down. Barok ignores her and steps over a neat pyramid of pale lavender boxfruit, one split to show the purple meat. As I step over them, I reach down and hook one.

"Hie!" she snaps, "that is not for you!"

Barok doesn't even look back, so I wink at her and keep walking.

"Yellow-haired dog-devil!" she shrieks. I follow Barok down into the hold, now a good-sized apartment, if rather warm, and get my first surprise. There's a young girl, bare-armed and bare-haired, sitting at the table, drawing with brush and paper.

"Shell-sea," Barok growls.

So intent she is that she ignores him for a moment, and I get a chance to see what she's drawing—a long squiggling line that she's tracing as if every twist and curve has meaning. Which it clearly doesn't, since it meanders all over the page.

"Shell-sea! Take it in the back!"

She says sullenly, "It's too hot back there," and then looks up. I'm blond and sunburned, quite a sight for a southern girl who has probably never seen someone who didn't have dark hair in her life. She stares at me as she gathers her papers, and then walks to the back, her eyebrows knit into a dark line, clumping her feet heavily, like someone whose wits aren't right.

Barok watches her go as if he doesn't like the taste of something. "My guests will be here later. Wait on deck."

"What am I supposed to do?" I ask.

"Play music and watch the guests," he says.

"That's all?" I ask. "You're paying me twenty in silver to watch?" He starts to answer sharply, and I say, "If you tell me what to watch *for*, I might do a better job."

"You watch for trouble," he says. "That's enough."

This is bad, my stomach knows. An employer who doesn't trust his guests or his employees is like a dog with thrum—*everyone* gets bitten. I could quit, hand him back the five silvers, take the boxfruit, and go. I

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still have a little less than half of the Cousin's silver; I can do fine on that for a week, if I sleep down on the docks.

"There's food on the stern deck; help yourself, and ignore the woman if she complains."

So I keep the job. Stomach-thinking. Heth says in the Proverbs that our life hinges on little things. That's certainly true for me.

I eat slowly and carefully; I know that if I eat too much, I'll be sleepy. But I fill my pack with boxfruit, pigeon's egg dumplings, and red peanuts. Especially red peanuts—a person can live a long time on red peanuts. While I'm eating, Shell-sea comes up and sits on the stern to watch me. As I said, I'm not tall, most men have a bit of reach on me, and she's nearly my height. She's wearing a school uniform, the dark red of one of the orders, and her thick hair is tied back with a red cord. The uniform would be fine on a young girl, but only emphasizes that she's not a child. She's too old for bare arms, for uncovered hair, too old for the cord that belts the robe high under her small breasts. She is probably just past menses.

After I eat, I use a bucket to rinse my hands and face. After awhile she says, "Why don't you take off your shirt when you wash?"

"You are a forward child," I say.

She has the grace to blush, but she still looks expectant. She wants to see how much hair I have on my chest. Southerners don't have much body hair.

"I've already bathed today," I say. Southerners waiting to see if I look like a hairy termit make me very uncomfortable. "Why do you have such an unusual name?" I ask.

"It's not a name, it's a nickname." She stares at her bare toes and they curl in embarrassment. I thought she was a bit of a half-wit, but away from Barok she's quick enough, and light on her feet.

I wonder if she's his fancy girl. Most southerners don't take a pretty girl until they already have a first wife.

"Shell-sea? Why do they call you that?"

"Not 'Shell-sea'," she says, exasperated, "*Chalcey*. What kind of name is 'Shell-sea'? My name is Chalcedony. I bet you don't know what that is."

"It's a precious stone," I say.

"How did you know?"

"Because I've been to the temple of Heth in Thelahckre," I say, "and the Shesket-lion's eyes are two chunks of chalcedony." I rinse my bowl in the bucket, then dump the water over the side; the soap scums the green water like oil. I'd been to a lot of places, trying to find the right place. The islands hadn't proven to be any better than the city of Lada on the coast. And Lada no better than Gibbun, which was supposed to

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be full of work, but the work was all for the new star port that the Cousins were building. My people forgetting their kin, living in slums. And Gibbun no better than Thelahckre.

"Why don't you have a beard?" she asks. Southerners can't grow beards until they're old, and then only long, bedraggled, wispy white things. They believe that all northerner men have them down to their belts.

"Because I don't," I say, irritated. "Why do you live with Barok?"

"He's my uncle."

We both stop then to watch a ship come down the river to the bay. Like the one the Cousin came in on, it has red eyes rimmed in violet, and violet sails. " 'Temperance,' " I read from the side.

Chalcey glances at me out of the corner of her eye.

I smile, "Yes, some northerners can even read."

"It's a ship of the Brothers of Succor," she says. "I go to the school of the Sisters of Clarity."

"And who are the Sisters of Clarity?" I ask.

"I thought you knew everything," she says archly. When I don't rise to this, she says, "The Sisters of Clarity are the sister order to the Order of Celestial Harmony."

"I see," I say, watching the ship glide down the river.

Testily, she adds. "Celestial Harmony is the first Navigation Order."

"Do they sail to the mainland?"

"Of course," she says, patronizing.

"What does it cost to be a passenger? Do they ever hire cargo-handlers or bookkeepers or anything like that?" I know the answer, but I can't help myself from asking.

She shrugs, "I don't know, I'm a student." Then, sly again, "I study drawing."

"That's wonderful," I mutter.

Passage *out* of here is my major concern. No one can work on a ship who isn't a member of a Navigational Order, and no order is likely to take a blond-haired northerner with a sudden vocation. Passage is expensive.

Even food doesn't keep me from being depressed.

The guests begin to arrive just after sunset, while the sky is still indigo in the west. I'm in the hold with two food servers. I'm sweltering in my jacket, they're (both women) serene in their blue robes. I play simple songs. Barok comes by and says to me, "Sing some northern thing."

"I don't sing," I say.

He glares at me, but I'm not about to sing, and he can't replace me now, so that's that. But I feel guilty, so I try to be flashy, playing lots of trills, and some songs that I think might sound strange to their ears.

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It's a small party, only seven men. Important men, because five boats clunk against ours. Or rich men. It's hard for me to make decisions about southerners, they act differently and I don't know what it means. For instance, southerners never say "no." So at first, I decided that they were all shifty bastards, but eventually I learned how to tell a "yes" that meant *no* from a "yes" that meant *yes*. It's not so hard—if you ask a shopkeeper if he can get you ground proyakapiti, and he says, "yes," then he *can*. If he giggles nervously and then says "yes," he's embarrassed, which means that he doesn't want you to know that he *isn't* able to get it, so you smile and say that you will be back for it later. He knows you are lying, you know he knows; you are both vastly relieved.

But these men smile and shimmer like oil, and Barok smiles and shimmers like oil, and I don't know what's cast, only that if tension were food, I could cut thick slices out of the air and dine on it.

There are no women except servers. I don't know if there are ever women at southern parties, because this is my first one. If a southern man toasts another, he cannot decline the toast without looking like a gelded stabos, so they drink a great deal of wine. After awhile, it seems to me that a man in green, ferret-thin, and a man in yellow are working together to get Barok drunk. If one of them toasts Barok, a bit later the other one does too. Barok would be drinking twice as much as they are, except that Barok himself toasts his guests, especially the ferret, a number of times, so it's hard to say. Besides, Barok is portly and can drink a great deal of wine.

But the servers are finished and cleaning up on deck, and Barok is near purple himself when he finally raps on the table for silence. I stop playing, and tap the bare sword under the serving table behind me with my foot, just to know where it is.

Barok clears a space on the long thin banquet table and claps his hands. Chalcey comes in, dressed in a robe the color of her school uniform, but with her arms and hair decently covered. The effect is nice, or would be if she didn't have that sullen, half-wit face she wears around her uncle.

She puts two rolled papers on the table, and then draws her veil close around her chin and crouches down like a proper girl. Barok opens one of the rolls, and I crane my head before the men close around it. All I get is a glimpse of is one of Chalcey's squiggly-line drawings, with some writing on it. The men murmur. The man in yellow says, "What is this?"

"Galgor coast," Barok points, "Lesian and Cauldor Islands, the Liliana Strait."

Charts? Navigation charts of the Islands? How could Barok have gotten . . . or rather, how could Chalcey have drawn . . She is studying drawing with an Order though, isn't she? *Chalcey* drew the charts? But

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the Cousins have sold magic to the Navigational Orders to make sure students *can't* take out so much as a piece of paper. How does she get them out of the school?

The ferret spits on the wooden floor and I wince. "What else have you got?" the ferret asks, brusque, rude.

"Only the Liliana Straits and the Hekkhare Cove," Barok says.

"Hekkhare!" the man in blue says, "I can buy *that* off any fisherman."

"Ah, but you can compare this chart with your own charts of Hekkhare to see how my source is. And there are more coming, I can assure you." Barok fairly oozes.

"These look as if they were drawn by an amateur," ferret says. Chalcey sticks out her lower lip and beetles her eyebrows. She needs a mother around to tell her not to do that.

"If you want pretty, go to the market and buy a painting," Barok says.

"I'm not interested in artistry, I'm interested in competence," ferret snaps. "What's to say you didn't copy Hekkhare from some fisherman?" A black market in navigation charts! Maybe Barok would be able to steer me to someone who smuggled, or whatever they did with them. I might be able to work my passage out of here. "I'd like to know a little more about this source," ferret says, tapping his teeth.

"It's within one of the Orders," Barok says, "that's all I can tell you."

Yellow robe says, "You're telling me that a member of the order would sell charts? That they can counter the spellbind?"

"I didn't say a 'member of the order,' " Barok says, "I said someone *within* the order."

"This stinks," ferret says, and silently I agree.

Barok shrugs. "If you don't want them, don't take them." But the dome of his forehead is slick and shining in the lamplight.

Ferret looks at Barok. The ferret is the power in this room; the others wait on him, Barok talks to him, yellow is his flunky. These men came in boats; boats that *go* somewhere in these islands mean money, and maybe some influence with the Navigational Order. And Barok—Barok lives in a slum. A two-bit nothing trying to sell to the big lizards. Oh, Heth, I am in trouble!

Ferret contemplates, and the others wait. "All right, I'll take these to verify their validity. If these prove accurate, we'll see about the next set."

"No," Barok says, "I'm giving you Hekkhare; you pay me the 200 for Liliana."

"What if I just take the charts?" ferret asks.

"You don't know my source," Barok says, desperate.

"So? Who *else* would you sell them to? The Orders?" the ferret says, bored.

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"Two hundred for Liliana," Barok says stubbornly.

Ferret rolls the charts up. "I don't think so," he says blandly.

My knees turn to water. I've fought in battle, scared off a thief in a warehouse once, but never done anything like this. Still, I start to crouch for my sword.

"Tell your barbarian to be still," ferret snaps. Yellow has a knife, so do the others. I don't need to be told again.

"These aren't free!" Barok says, "I have expenses, I—, I owe people money, Sterler. I don't pay people, you'll never get another chart! They're good, I swear they're good!"

"We'll negotiate the next ones," the ferret says, and nods at the rest. They rise and start to go.

I know that Barok is going to lunge, although it is a tokking stupid thing to do. But he does it, his hands hooked to claw at ferret. I think he only wants the charts, that he can't bear to see them go, but yellow reacts instantly. I see the flash of metal from under his robe, but I don't think Barok does. It isn't a good blow, they are all drunk, and Barok is a fleshy man. The knife handle stands out of his belly at about his liver, and Barok staggers back against the table. For a moment, he doesn't know about the knife—sometimes a knife-wound feels just like a punch.

"You can't have it," he says, "I'll tell them about you!" Then he sees the knife, and the wine-colored stain on his dark robe, and his mouth opens, pink and wet and helpless.

"Find out his source," the ferret says.

Chalcey is staring, blank-faced. I do not want her to see. I remember what it is like to see.

Yellow robe takes the knife handle and holds on to it, his face only a foot or so from Barok's. I smell shit. Barok looks at him, his face slack with disbelief, and starts to blubber. Some men's minds snap when they die.

"Who gets them for you?" yellow robe asks.

Arterial blood, dark and mixed with stomach blood, pumps out around the knife. Barok is silent. Maybe Barok is refusing to betray his niece, but I think the truth is that he has lost his wits. He has certainly voided his bowels. When yellow robe twists the knife, he screams, and then blubbers some more, his saliva not yet bloodied. He wants to go to his knees, but yellow robe has the knife handle, and Barok's hung on that blade like meat on a hook.

Chalcey is crouched, wrapped in her veil. She edges backward away from the men, her hands behind her, scooting backward like a crab until she bumps into my legs and stifles a little scream.

Ferret turns to us. "What do you know?"

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I shrug casually, or as casually as I can. "I was hired today; he wouldn't tell me what he hired me for."

He looks down at Chalcey. I say, "He hired her right after he hired me."

Barok begins to say, over and over again, "Stop it, stop it, please stop it," monotonously, his hands making little clutching motions at his belly, but afraid of the knife.

"Tell me your source," yellow robe says.

Barok doesn't seem to understand. "Stop it, please stop it," he whimpers. *Die*, I think. Die before you say anything, you fat old man!

"Tok it," ferret says, "You've ruined it."

I whisper to Chalcey, "Scream and try to run up the stairs."

She rolls her eyes at me, but doesn't move.

Yellow robe shouts in Barok's face, "Barok! Listen to me!" He slaps the dying man. "Who is your source? You want it to stop? Tell me your source!"

"Help me," Barok whispers. There is blood in his mouth, now. The shadows from the lamps are hard, the big red-robed belly is in the light, and he is starting to spill flesh and bowels. The smell is overwhelming; one of the men turns and vomits, and adds that to the stench.

"Tell me where you get the charts, we'll get you a healer," yellow robe says. A lie, it's too late for a healer. But a dying man has nothing to lose by believing a lie. His eyes flicker toward Chalcey. Does he even know what is happening, understand what they are demanding? He licks his lips as if about to speak. I can't let him speak. So I whistle, five clear discordant notes, to waken one of the spells in my skull, the one that eats power, light and heat, and all the lights go out.

Black. Star-magic is easy to do, hard to engineer.

"TOK!" someone shouts in the dark, and Barok screams, a high, white noise. Things fall, I push Chalcey toward the stairs and grab my sword. I'm almost too frightened to move myself; maybe if it wasn't for Chalcey, I wouldn't, but sometimes responsibility lifts me above my true nature.

I collide with someone in the dark, slap at their face with my sword, and feel something hook in my jacket, tear at my shirt and the bindings I wear under it, then burn in my side. Then the person is gone. Ferret is screaming, "The stairs! Block the stairs!" when I fall over the bottom step.

The darkness only lasts a handful of heartbeats. It's a whistler spell, better against real power like the Cousins's lights then against natural things like a lamp, and it always makes me tired later. I turn at the stairs just as the lights come back. Blinded for a moment, I slap with my sword for the flame and knock it flying. Burning oil sprays across the

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room, I see blue robe cover his face, and, gods help him, poor Barok squirming on the floor.

The boat is tinder dry, and instantly the pools of oil from the lamp are full of licking blue flames. I run up the stairs. Chalcey is standing—not by the gangplank but next to the rail. My pack is there, and in the pack the cloak with the badge, and my chain vest and bracers—all I own in the world. I go for the girl and the pack, my shield arm clenched against my burning side. Ferret and the others will come boiling out of the hold like digger bees at any moment. I look down over the railing and see one of the sailboats, a soft Cousins's light clipped to the mast, and, in the glow, a green-robed adolescent with a cleric's shaven head, looking up at me. I grab Chalcey's arm and shout, "Jump!" and we land on top of the poor bastard, Chalcey's shrieking and my oomph! drowning the boy's bleat of surprise. Chalcey tumbles, but I have aimed truer, breaking his arm and probably his collar bone, so that he lies stunned and wide-eyed. I pitch him out of the boat. He is struggling in the water as I shove us off. I hope to Heth he can swim; I can't.

Our boat has a simple, single sail; it's a pleasure boat rather than a real fisherman's boat, but it will have to do. I run the sail up awkwardly. The wind will drive us downriver, toward the harbor. I don't see the boats of the others.

There is no pursuit. I think that ferret and the others have cut across the gangplank rather than make for the sailboats. I crouch next to the tiller and gingerly explore my injury with my fingers, a long flat scrape that crossed the ribs before the shirt and bindings and jacket hung it up. It bleeds freely, but it's not deep.

Chalcey curls in the prow of the boat, looking back toward her uncle's boat. The fire must have eaten the wood in huge bites. When we reach the bridge, I look back and see that the boat has been cut away and floats free in the river, burning bright and pouring out black, oily smoke. Two sailboats skitter away like dragonflies, silhouettes against the flames. Then we are enveloped in black smoke and ash which hides the boat from us, and hides us from everyone else.

Coughing and hacking, and, Heth forgive me, spitting, I keep us in the smoke as long as I can.

When we are almost out of the harbor, Chalcey asks, "Where are we going?"

"I don't know," I say. "I wish we had one of your charts."

It's a clear night, we have a brisk breeze and no moon yet. A good night to escape. I follow the coast, away from the city. On the shore, dogs bark at us, and to each other, distant and lonely. The sound chains along the coast as we sail.

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"Was that magic?" Chalcey says.

"Was what magic," I say absently. I'm tired and not feeling well; it is painful to cough and spit ash and soot when your side is cut open.

"When it got dark. When you whistled."

I nod in the darkness, then realize she can't see it. "Yes, that was a little magic."

"Are you a mage?"

Do I *look* like a mage? Would I be living this way if I could smelt metal, and make starstuff in bright colors, and machines and lights? "No, littleheart," I say, talking sweet because my thoughts are not nearly so patient, "I'm just a whistler. A fighter with no money and only a little skill."

"Do you think they'll get a healer for my uncle?"

No answer to give but the truth. "Chalcey, your uncle is dead."

She doesn't say anything for a long time, and then she starts to cry. It's chilly, and she's tired and frightened. It doesn't hurt her to cry. Maybe I cry a little, too; it wouldn't be the first time.

We bob along, the waves going *chop, chop, chop* against the prow of the little boat. Dogs bark, to us and to each other. Along our left, the lights from the city are fewer and fewer, the houses darker and smaller. It smells like broom trees out here, not city. In the wake of our little sailboat, craken phosphoresce. I wonder, since their light is blue, why is craken dye yellow?

Chalcey speaks out of the dark, "Could we go to my grandmother?"

"I don't know, sweet, where is your grandmother?"

"Across the Liliana Strait. On Lesian."

"If I knew where it was, I could try, even without a chart, but I'm a foreigner, littleheart."

"I can draw a chart. I drew those charts."

She sounds like a little girl. I smile tiredly into the darkness. "But I don't have anything for you to copy."

"I don't need to copy," she says. "They're in my *head.* If I have drawn a chart, even once, I never forget it. That's why my Uncle Barok brought me to the Order to go to school. But we've only practiced with Hekkhare and now Liliana Strait."

"So you drew those charts from your head?" I ask.

"Of course," she tosses her hair, her veil around her shoulders, and I can see her against the sky, just for the moment the imperious and sly girl who tried to impress the northern barbarian. "Everybody thinks that the charts are safe, all the paper and everything is spellbound. But I don't carry any papers or anything; it's all in my head."

"Chalcey," I breathe. "Can you draw one?"

"We don't have any paper, and it's dark."

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"We'll land in a few hours and get some sleep. Then you can use my knife and draw it on the bottom of the boat."

"On the bottom of the boat?" She is diffident.

But I'm elated. Two people hiding from the rest of the island, in a small sailboat not meant for the open sea, going on a young girl's memory of a chart. But it's better than *Barok's* choices.

We have a fair breeze, the little sailboat is quiet except for the slap of the sail. The water is close, right at my hand. Chalcey says she's cold. I tell her to dig my cloak out of my pack and see if she can get some sleep.

I think she sleeps awhile. I keep pushing us on, thinking to go a little farther before we rest, passing places to pull the boat up, until I see the line of gray that means dawn and take us into a stream that cuts down to the ocean.

"Chalcey," I say, "when the boat stops, jump out and pull."

We come aground, and I try to stand up, and nearly fall over. My legs are numb from crouching, and my side has stiffened in the night.

"What's wrong?" Chalcey says, holding the prow to get out.

"Nothing," I say, "be careful when you get out of the boat."

The cold water is up to my waist and makes me gasp, but at the prow, Chalcey is in water only to her shins. I grit my teeth and push, sliding against the uneven bottom, and she pulls, and together we get the boat well aground. I lash it to a tree, the tide is still coming in and I don't want to lose it, and then I grab my pack and stumble up the bank.

I should check the area, but I ache and I'm exhausted, so tired. I'm a little dizzy, so I promise myself I'll only rest for a minute. I prop my head against the pack and close my eyes. The world swirls. . . .

Some tokking hero, I think, and then laugh. That's one quality to which I have never aspired.

We're in heavy trees, tall pale yellow fronds of broom trees, heavily tasseled at this time of year. I'm covered with chukka bites, and the cut in my side is hot; I can feel my pulse beating in it.

There's no sign of Chalcey.

I lever myself painfully up on my elbow and listen. Nothing. Could she have wandered off and gotten lost?

"Chalcey," I hiss.

No answer.

"Chalcey!" I say, louder.

"Here!" comes a voice from over the bank, and then her head pops up, floating above the soft lemon brush as if it had been plopped on a bush. Maybe I'm feverish.

"Are you in the water?" I ask.

"No," she says, "I'm in the boat. What's your name, anyway?"

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"Jahn," I say.

"I took your knife, but you didn't wake up. Are you—" she hesitates, wide-eyed, and my heart lurches, "I mean, is your hurt bad?"

"No," I say, attempting to sit up naturally and failing.

"I drew a chart in the bottom of the boat, and then I used mud to make the lines darker." She shakes her head, "Drawing with a knife isn't the same as drawing with a pen."

She comes up on the bank, and we breakfast on boxfruit and red peanuts out of my pack. Breakfast and water improve my spirits immensely. I check Chalcey's drawing. She clenches her hands nervously while I look at it. As soon as a wave puts a little water in the bottom of the boat, the mud will wash out of the lines, and I have no way of judging how accurate it might be anyway, but I tell her it looks wonderful.

To hide her pleasure, she turns her head and spits matter-of-factly into the stream. I wince, but don't say anything.

We have nothing to store water in.

"How far is it to Lesian?" I ask.

She thinks it's about two days. "Jahn," she says, self-conscious about my name, "where did you learn your magic?"

"One of the Cousins put copper and glass in the bones of my head," I say. Not exactly true, but close enough.

That silences questions for awhile.

We get some good drinks of water and relieve ourselves, and maybe she prays to her deities, I don't know. Then we raise our pineapple-green sail, and we are off.

She chatters awhile about school. I like listening to her chatter. When it gets hot at midday, I have her spread my cloak across the prow and crawl into the shade underneath it. I stay with the tiller and wish for a hat. I've been browned by the sun, but the light off the green water is blinding and bright, and my nose suffers.

She sleeps during the heat of the day, and I nod. We are headed for a promontory which marks where we cut across the strait. In the afternoon, we have some bruised boxfruit out of my pack, which helps our thirst a bit. The way west is suddenly blocked by a spit of land; if Chalcey's drawing can be trusted, that's our promontory. Chalcey's chart indicates that it's not good to go ashore here, otherwise I'd stop for fresh water. We head for open sea, and I pray that the breeze holds up. I'm stiff, and tacking accurately all the way across is probably beyond my navigational skills.

I'm thirsty; Chalcey must be, too. She doesn't complain, but she gets quiet. The farther we go into the strait, the smaller the land behind us gets; the smaller the land, the quieter she gets. Once I ask her what the

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crossing was like when she came to live with her uncle. "It was a big boat," is all she'll say.

I'm lightheaded from sun and thirst and fever by the time evening comes, and the cool is a relief. The sun goes down with the sudden swiftness of the south. I dig the pigeon's egg dumplings out of my pack, but they're too salty and just make me thirstier. Chalcey is hungry, though, and eats hers and half of mine.

"Jahn?" she says.

"Yes?"

"The Cousins—why do they call them that?"

"Because we are all kin," I say. "It is like in my home, when a place gets too big, and there isn't enough land to let all the stabos graze, part of the kin go somewhere else, and start a new home. Our many times elders were the Cousins. The stars are like islands for them. Some came here to live, but there was a war and the ships no longer came, and our elders' ships grew too old, and we forgot about the Cousins except for stories. Now they have found us again."

"And they help us?" she asks.

"Not really," I say. "They help the high-ons, mostly."

"What are 'high-ons'?" she asks. Southern doesn't have a word for high-ons, so I always just use the two southern words.

"High-ons, the old men who run things and have silver. Or the guilds, they are like high-ons."

"Were you a high-on?" she asks.

I laugh, which hurts my side. "No, littleheart," I say. "I am the unlucky child of unlucky parents. They believed that some of the Cousins would help us, would teach us. But the high-ons, they don't like it if anyone else has strength. So they sent an army and killed my kin. Things were better before the Cousins came."

"The Order says that the Cousins are good; they bring gifts."

"We *pay* for those gifts," I say. "With craken dye and ore and land. And with our own ways. Anywhere the Cousins come, things get bad."

It gets darker. Chalcey wraps herself in my cloak, and I hunch over the tiller. It isn't that the boat needs much sailing; there's a light wind and the sea is blessedly calm (Someone seems to favor us, despite our attack on the green-robed boy to get this boat), but the boat is too small for me to go anywhere else, so I sit at the tiller.

The spray keeps the back of my left shoulder damp, and the breeze seems to leach the warmth out of me. My teeth start chattering.

"Chalcey?"

"What?" she murmurs sleepily from the prow.

"I am feeling a bit under, littleheart. Do you think you could sit with me and we could share the cloak?"

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I can feel her hesitation in the dark. She's afraid of me, and that pains me. It's funny, too, considering. "I don't want anything other than warmth," I say gently.

She feels her way slowly from the prow. "It's *your* cloak," she says, "you can have it if you want."

"I think we can share it." I say. "Sit next to me, the tiller will be between us, and you can lean against me and sleep."

Gingerly, she sits down next to me, the boat rocking gently with her movements, and throws the cloak around our shoulders. She touches my arm on the tiller and jerks back. "You're hot," she says. Then she surprises me by touching my forehead. "You have a fever!"

"Don't worry about it," I say, oddly embarrassed. "Just sit here." She curls against me, and, after a few minutes, she leans her head on my shoulder. Her hair smells sweet. It's soothing to have her there. I try to keep the constellation southerners call the Crown to my right.

"How old are you?" she asks.

"Thirty-one," I say.

"That's not so old."

I laugh.

"Well," she is defensive, "you have white hair, but your face isn't old."

Sometimes I feel very old, and never more than now.

I jerk awake from scattered dreams of being back on Barok's boat. It's dawn. Chalcey stirs against my shoulder and settles again. I think about the sea, about our journey. Celestial navigation is not my strong point; I hope we haven't drifted too much. I hope that Chalcey's chart is good, and I wonder how much Barok will get paid for a boat with a chart carved on it, even if the chart isn't very good, but blue flames lick the chart, and I'm on Barok's boat again. . . .

I jerk awake. My fever feels low; because it's morning, I'm certain. I try to open my pack without disturbing Chalcey, but she's asleep against my right shoulder, and I'm awkward with my left hand and my side is stiff, so after a moment she straightens up. We have five boxfruit left, so we split one. I'm too thirsty for red peanuts, but Chalcey eats a few.

As the sun climbs, so does my fever, and I start dreaming even when my eyes are open. At one point, Trevin is in the boat with us, sitting there in his blue jerkin with the gray fur low on the shoulders, and I must be talking to him, because Chalcey says, "Who is Trevin?"

I blink and lean over the side and splash cold water on my sunburned face. When I sit up, I'm dizzy from the blood rushing to my head, but I know where I am. "Trevin was a friend," I say. "He's dead now."

"Oh," she says, and adds, with the callousness of youth, "How did he die?"

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How did Trevin die? I have to think. "The flux," I say. "We were marching to Bashtoy, we were retreating, Trevin and I had decided to fight against Scalthalos High-on since he'd burned out Sckarline. It was winter, and we didn't have much to eat, and the people who got sick, many of them died." I add, "I joined the fight because of Trevin." I don't add, "I was in love."

When it gets hot, Chalcey soaks her veil in water and covers my head with it. I clutch the tiller. It seems that I am not sailing the boat so much as it is sailing me. She doles out the boxfruit, too, peeling them and splitting the purple segments.

"I think," she says, "that maybe I should look at your side."

"No," I say.

"Don't worry," she says, moving toward me in the boat.

"No," I snap.

"I could put some cool seawater on it," she says. "Saltwater is good for an injury."

"I don't take off my shirt," I say. I'm irrational and I know it, but I'm not going to take off my shirt. Not when someone is around. We were finally in Bashtoy and almost everyone I knew was dead, and the MilitiaMaster said, "Boy, what's your name?" and I didn't know that he was talking to me. "Boy!" he shouted, "what's your name!" and I stuttered "Jahn, sir." "We'll call you Jahn-the-clever," he said, "you're in my group now," and the others laughed, and after that I was Jahn-the-clever until they discovered that I was really clever, but I still wasn't going to take off my shirt.

My thoughts run like squirrels in a cage, and sometimes I talk out loud. Trevin comes back. He asks, "Would you rather have grown up anywhere but Sckarline?"

Chalcey soaks her veil in water and tries to keep my face cool.

"Wanji taught us about the cities," I say, "and she was right. I've been there, Trevin." My voice is high. "Wherever the Cousins come, they use us, they live like Scalthalos High-on, and we clean their houses and are grateful for light and giz stick on Sixth-day night. People don't care about kin anymore, they don't care about anything. Wanji told us about culture clash, that the weaker culture dissolves."

"Wanji and Aneal, Ayuedesh and Kumar, they dedicated their lives to helping us," Trevin says.

"Aneal *apologized* to me, Trevin!" I say. "She apologized for the terrible wrong they had done! She said it would be better if they never came!"

"I know," he said.

"Jahn," Chalcey says. "Jahn, there's nobody here but *me!* Talk to me! Don't die!" She is crying. Her veil is wet, and so cold it takes my breath away.

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Trevin didn't know. I never told him about Aneal apologizing, I never told anyone. I blink and he wavers, and I blink and blink and he goes away. "You're not Trevin," I say, "I'm arguing with myself."

It's bright and hot.

I have my head on my arm.

The sky is lavender and red, and there is a dark stripe across the water that I can't make go away, no matter how hard I blink. I think that the fever is making my vision go, or that the sun has made me blind, until Chalcey, crying, says that it is Lesian.

There is no place to land, so we head up the coast northeast until we come to a river. "Go up here!" Chalcey says. "I know this place! I know that marker!" She is pointing to a pile of stone. "My grandmother lives up here!"

The night comes down around us before we see a light, like a cooking fire. I call instructions to shift the sail in a cracked voice; Chalcey has quick hands, thank Heth.

I run the boat aground, and Chalcey leaps out, calling and pulling at the boat, but I can't move. People come down and stand looking at us, and Chalcey says that her grandmother is Llasey. In the village they know her grandmother, although her grandmother lives a long walk away. I have a confused sense of being helped out of the boat, and I tell them, "We have silver, we can pay." Blur of people in the dark, and then into a place where there is too much light.

Then they are forcing hot seawater between my teeth, I can't drink it, then I think, "it's broth." The fire flickers off a whitewashed wall, and a bareheaded woman says, "Let me help you."

I don't want them to take off my shirt. "Not my shirt!" I say, raising my hands. They are talking and I can't follow what they are saying, but with gentle persistent hands they deftly hold my wrists and peel off the torn jacket and the shirt. The gentle voice says, "What's *this?*" and cuts the bindings on my chest.

Chalcey says, startled, "What's *wrong* with him!" I turn my face away.

A woman smiles at me and says, "You'll be all right, dear." Chalcey stares at me, betrayed, and the woman says to her (and to me), "She's a woman, dear. She'll be all right, there's nothing wrong with her except a bit of fever and too much sun."

And, so, stripped, I slide defenseless into sleep, thinking of the surprise on Chalcey's face.

I sleep a great deal during the next two days, wake up and drink soup, and sleep again. Chalcey isn't there when I wake up, although there is a pallet of blankets on the floor. And perhaps if I wake up and hear her, I pretend to be asleep and soon sleep again. But eventually I can't sleep

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anymore. Tuwle, the woman with the gentle hands who has given me a bed, asks me if I want a shirt or a dress, and, running my hand over my cropped hair, I say a shirt. But I tell her to call me Jahnna.

They bring me my shirt, neatly mended. And they won't take my silver.

Finally, Chalcey comes to see me. I am sitting on the bed where I have slept so long, shucking beans. It embarrasses me to be caught in shirt and breeches, shucking beans, although I've shucked beans, mended clothes, done all manner of woman's work in men's clothes. But it has been a long time since I've felt so self-conscious.

She comes in, tentative as a bird, and says, "Jahn?"

So I say, "Sit down," and immediately regret it, since there is no place to sit but next to me on the bed.

We go through the old routine of "how are you feeling?" and "what have you been doing?" She holds her veil tightly, although the women here don't go veiled for everyday.

Finally she says, in a hurt little voice, "You could have *told* me."

"I haven't told anyone in years." In a way, I almost didn't think I *was* a woman anymore.

"But I'm not just *any*one!" She is vexed. And how could she know that in a fight you become close comrades, yes, but that we know nothing about each other?

The snap of beans seems very loud. I think of trying to explain, about cutting my hair off to fight with Trevin, and learning long before Trevin died that fighting makes people strangers to themselves. Heth says life hinges on little things, like the fact that I am tall for a woman and flat chested, and when the MilitiaMaster at Bashtoy saw me, half-starved and shorthaired, he thought that I was a boy, and so after that I *was*. Snap. And I run my thumb down the pod and the beans spill into the bowl.

To break the silence, she says, "Your sunburn is almost gone," and, amazingly, she blushes scarlet.

I realize then how it is with her. She had fancied herself in love. "I'm sorry, littleheart," I say, "I didn't intend to hurt or embarrass you. I'm embarrassed, too."

She looks at me sideways. "What do you have to be embarrassed about?"

"It's a little like having no clothes on, everybody knowing, and now that my kin are gone, I am always a stranger, wherever I go—" but she is looking at me without comprehension, so I falter and say lamely, "it's hard to explain."

"What are you going to do now?" she asks.

I sigh. That is a question that has been on my mind a great deal. Here

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there is no chance of saving passage money to get back to the mainland. "I don't know."

"I told my grandmother about you," Chalcey says. "She said you could come and stay with us, if you would work hard. I said you were very strong." Again she blushes scarlet, and hurries on, "It's a little farm, it used to be better, but there's only my grandmother, but we could help, and I think we could be friends."

As I learned during the long walk to Bashtoy, you may be tokked, but if you just look to the immediate future, sometimes, eventually, you find the way.

"I'd like that, littleheart," I say, meaning every word. "I'd like to be friends."

The future, it seems, does indeed hinge on little things. ●

HEAD

Sometimes you wish
it was replaceable: your looks,
your particular peace of mind.
Your particular head
seems lost up on its spindle
with only yourself
to turn to. Another head
would look fine up there,
your wife's, your lover's,
a painter's, a president's head.
Someday heads will be interchangeable.
If you don't understand me,
I'll just lend you my head.
Too heavy! you'll scream,
as I pop yours off and slam
mine on. I promise
not to drop yours, knowing heads
aren't forever, or everything
they're cracked up to be.

—Steve Rasnic Tem

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WHY I SHOT KENNEDY

Sharon N. Farber

The truth about the Kennedy assassination may be weirder than we've *ever* imagined...

art: Jan Glinski after Warhol

1. **I was bored** in 1963. I would have done it at Hyannisport in '59, but I can't swim.

2. **Mom said it was okay.** She said I should sink the P.T. boat. Boy, he swam good.

3. **I didn't mean to.** Not all three bullets. I didn't practice enough.

4. **It was a class project.** Janey got to kill Genghis Khan and Tommy snuffed Hitler. I got stuck with this. Boooring.

5. **It wasn't my fault.** The brothers, I mean. They all looked alike. My teacher didn't find out, so I still got a *B*.

6. **My brother dared me to.** When he was in my grade, he messed up Oppenheimer's bombs so they didn't work, only nothing changed. He got a *D*.

7. **It's not like it matters.** I mean, he's dead there, he's still alive in some other parallel. Sometimes he's not even born. It just depends on the branching, it's all relative. At least, that's what my brother said when he broke Mom's favorite interface. He got grounded for a week.

8. **People should really thank me.** This way, no World War III, no nuclear winter, no cockroach plague. It's sort of like I did them a favor, right?

9. **Dad didn't mind.** He thought it was neat the way it made the Sixties turn out. He said even a professional historizer couldn't have predicted the Sixties. He was real proud.

10. **My dog did it.** He was on the grassy knoll. ●

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AULD LANG BOOM

art: Dell Harris

by Jack McDevitt

The author has a collection of short stories out soon from Pulphouse, and early next year, Ace will release his third novel, *The Engines of God*. The idea for the following story grew out of a dinner he once had with a friend at an Italian restaurant in Washington, D.C. This meal was suddenly interrupted by the news that we had begun bombing Baghdad...

I've never believed in the supernatural. The universe is too subtle, too rational, to permit entry to gods or devils. There's no room for the paranormal. No fortune telling. No messages from beyond. No divine retribution.

But I am not sure how to explain certain entries in my father's diary, which came into my hands recently after his death in the Jersey Event. On the surface, I have no choice but to conclude that there is either a

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hoax, or a coincidence of unimaginable proportions. Still, it *is* my father's handwriting, and the final entry is dated the day before he died. If there is deception, I cannot imagine how it has been accomplished.

I found the diary locked in the upper right hand drawer of his oak desk. The keys were in a small glass jar atop the desk, obviating the point of the lock, but my father was never one to concern himself with consistency. He would have put it in there himself: my mother had died many years before, and he lived alone. The desk itself was intact when I got to it after the disaster, although it had been ruined by rain.

Nobody will ever be sure how many died when the rock came down off the Jersey coast. Conservative estimates put the figure at a million and a half. A hundred thousand simply vanished, probably washed out to sea by the giant tidal waves. Others died in the quakes, storms, power disruptions, and epidemics that followed the strike.

That night was, of course, the kind of seminal event that marks everyone who lives through it. No family in the country was untouched by this worst natural disaster in recorded history. *What were you doing when the meteor fell?*

I was a thousand miles away, watching *Great Railway Journeys* with my family, when they broke in with the initial reports. I spent the balance of the evening trying to call my father, or anyone else I knew who lived in the South Jersey-Philadelphia area. But there was no phone service.

So now I have this cryptic document, stretching back into 1961. It is less a diary than a journal, a record of political, literary, and social opinions. My father was a dentist. He was good with kids and with nervous adults. A sign in his waiting room advertised: WE CATER TO COWARDS. But his interests extended far beyond his office. He was alert to every scientific and political trend, a student of the arts, a champion of the afflicted. He was a Renaissance dentist. He was capable of sulphurous explosions when he detected some particularly outrageous piece of hypocrisy or venality. He was a sworn enemy of politicians, lawyers, and professional athletes who charge kids twenty bucks an autograph. He instinctively distrusted people in power.

He favored requiring all heads of state to be mothers with six or more draft-age children. He wanted to mount a massive national effort to save the schools, to be funded by "downsizing" the federal establishment. He would have applied capital punishment *with vigor because it has the dual advantage of reducing the criminal population, and providing the average malefactor with the attention he desires.*

My father was sexually active, and many of the women who drifted through his life would no doubt have been shocked to read his appraisals of their performances:

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Lisa: screams and groans and bites a lot, but can't act well enough to carry it off. Down deep, where it counts, she is about as wild and uninhibited as a good phone directory.

Michele: probably better than an old movie.

Martie: woman doesn't know when to quit. Would wear out a jackhammer.

I have of course fictionalized the names.

The pages were also full of antireligious views: for reasons never clear to me, he believed Methodist ministers to be uniformly a pack of scoundrels. This was especially odd in that he had never had any connection that I knew of with that church. *The average congressman,* he wrote during the late eighties, *is roughly equal in moral content to a Methodist preacher.* The Creator himself did not escape criticism: The world is such a misbegotten wreck *that it is impossible to believe any self-respecting deity would accept the blame for it.* And: *If indeed there is anything divine out there, is it really so desperate for affection that it would pursue us so relentlessly?* Toward the end of his life, he underwent a conversion to Catholicism, but it did not take.

In politics he was neutral: he disliked everyone. The average Republican had *the integrity of pull taffy,* and the Democrat *the intelligence of a cinder block.* On the day that he celebrated his fiftieth birthday, he delivered the ultimate judgment: *If there is a career more attractive to scoundrels and frauds than professional politics, it must be the Methodist ministry.*

Perhaps I violated an ethic in reading my father's diary. I wish now that I had not. But the charm and vitality of his observations, his obvious appetite for life, his Olympian assaults against those he considered frauds and halfwits, were irresistible. Once started, I could not stop. And I began to realize how little I had appreciated him during his lifetime.

I started seriously reading the diary at about the time I'd given up hope that he might have survived. I'd seen the final entries, and knew that he planned to be in Atlantic City, the worst possible place. But there was always the chance that he might have been sidetracked, gone somewhere else, been delayed by a woman. I know better now.

The first entry was dated July 16, 1961. It spells out the rationale behind the diary, which was that he hoped his "occasional ruminations" would one day be of general interest. (My father was never afflicted with modesty.) He also revealed an ambition to become an essayist, and believed that a daily account of his reflections would be a priceless aid to such an endeavor. I should add, parenthetically, that his ambitions came to nothing. If he ever actually tried to compile a manuscript, I have no knowledge of it.

Six days later, he recorded my birth. And, in another week, the death

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of my mother. He seldom mentioned her to me, but the diary gave over a dozen pages of cramped handwriting to reminiscences of their early years together, and of his conviction that, were it not for his responsibilities (by which I gathered he was talking about me), his life had become worthless. Judging from the diary, he never after seriously considered marriage although, as I mentioned, there were many women. I was aware of his escapades, of course, while I was growing up. And I was baffled: my father's appearance was rather ordinary. He was also short and, when I was a teen-ager, beginning to lose his hair. It was hard to see what brought that endless supply of women to the door. I don't know yet.

By the time I had read into the late 70's, I noticed there was an odd trend. There are passages, and implications, which are unsettling. My father was, if anything, a rationalist. And I could sense his increasing dismay at events which he could not explain. I began to read more intently, and eventually found it impossible to lay the book aside. I will never forget the cold, rainswept evening during which I came back to the final entry. And read it in the frantic glare of what had gone before.

Now, I don't know what to make of it. The only possible conclusion is that the diary is a fabrication. It *has* to be. Yet I do not see how that is possible. My wife, after she had finished it, suggested we burn it.

I have not been able to bring myself to do that. Nor can I keep its contents entirely to myself. Consequently, without taking a position on the matter, I have had the pertinent entries privately printed, in order to make them available to a small group of my friends, whose judgment I trust. Perhaps someone among them will be able to offer a rational explanation.

One final note: the "Rob" who figures so prominently in this narrative was Orin R. Robinson, who served 1958–60 in the Far East with my father. Curiously, they seem not to have been close friends until after the chance meeting in the Minneapolis airport described in the first entry in the Extract below. My father, incidentally, was on his way to Fargo, pursuing a young woman of his acquaintance.

(ATTACHMENT)

Being Extracts from the Diary of Samuel H. Coswell

Minneapolis, Friday, November 22, 1963

Black day. The President's dead.

I was having lunch with Rob. First time I'd seen him since Navy days on the *McCusker*. Hell of a reunion. We were sitting in a dark little place off Washington Avenue, all electric candles and checkerboard tablecloths

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and bare hardwood floors. A waitress had filled our glasses with Chianti and set the bottle down. We were already deep into reminiscing about old friends and old times, and Rob swept up his glass with a flourish, and raised it toward the light. "Here's to you, Sam," he said, "I've missed you," and in that brief hesitation, when one tastes the moment before the wine, I became aware of raised voices.

Chair legs scraped the floor. *"—Shot him—"* someone said. The words hung in the still air, whispered, almost disembodied. Then Kennedy's name. Doors banged, and traffic sounds got loud. Outside, a postal truck pulled up beside a mailbox.

There were bits and pieces of conversation. *"How badly hurt?" "—They get the guy?" "—Be fine. Can't kill—" "What time is it? Is the stock market still open?"*

They brought out a television and we watched the early reports and learned the worst. "Not much of a reunion," I told Rob.

He lives in L.A. We'd met at the airport, both passing through. He's an aircraft design consultant, and he was on his way home from Chicago. We got to talking, decided not to miss the opportunity, and rearranged our flight schedules. Which was how we came to be eating a late lunch together when the news came from Dallas.

We walked back to our Sheraton and pushed into the bar. The TV threw a pale glare over the crowd, which kept getting bigger. Nobody said much. Cronkite reported that a police officer had been shot, and then he was back a few minutes later to tell us that a suspect had been captured in a movie theater. Name's Oswald. Nobody seems to know anything about him. I guess we'll start getting some answers tomorrow. Meantime, there's a lot of talk about a conspiracy. And we now have Lyndon Johnson.

I'm surprised this has hit me so hard. I've never been high on Kennedy. Although, as politicians go, he was likable. But it will make it harder to run the Republic if presidents have to go into hiding.

Rob is up one floor. We'd originally planned to have breakfast in the morning. He has an early flight, though, and I don't think either of us feels much like socializing. My own flight's at noon. So I will sleep late. And maybe one day we'll meet again in some other airport.

Fargo, Saturday, November 23, 1963

Ellen and I spent the day parked in front of a TV. Gloomy business, national mourning. Oswald looks like a looney. Still no explanations. There are theories that he was working for the Cubans, or the CIA, or the Russians. You take a look at this guy, and it's hard to believe any sensible organization would use him. He doesn't look reliable. We'll see. If we trace it to Moscow, what happens then?

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Ellen is showering now. She's a knockout, enough to get anyone's juices running, but there's a ceremonial quality to the preparations. The assassination has cast gloom on us all, I guess. Well, I'll stand by my station best I can.

En route to Philadelphia, Sunday, November 24, 1963

Kennedy's funeral tomorrow.

Never knew anyone as wild as Ellen was last night. Is this the way we hide our mortality?

Philadelphia, Saturday, August 1, 1964

Call from Rob. He's going to be in town next week, and we will get together. Funny about him: when we were in the Navy, he seemed a bit stand-offish. Difficult to get to know. Maybe it's the Kennedy thing, but he seems warmer, friendlier than I remember. I wouldn't have believed he'd ever have taken the time to look me up. He's a curious mix, simultaneously idealistic and cynical, gregarious and distant. He'd be horrified to hear this, but the truth is, he's a fascist. A goodhearted one, but a fascist all the same. He's a great believer in order, and is fond of quoting Plato on the dangers of giving freedom to the undisciplined. We talked for almost an hour (his nickel). We agreed that western civilization is on its last legs. I don't really believe that, but he's persuasive, and anyhow predicting doom always gives one such a warm feeling. Is that why there are so many Fundamentalists?

We were both elated by the lunar photographs taken by Ranger 7. First closeups ever. I told him we were taking the first steps into a vast sea. He laughed. *A vast desert, maybe.* He doesn't think we will ever leave the Earth-moon system. Why not? *Where else is there to go?*

Philadelphia, Friday, August 7, 1964

Great day.

I don't know when I've enjoyed myself more. We spent most of the evening arguing over Goldwater. Rob is worried that Johnson will win, and then give away southeast Asia. I'm scared to death Barry would give Hanoi an atomic alternative shortly after the swearing-in ceremony. Get out or get fused.

I don't think I've ever properly appreciated Rob. The world's a more comic place when he's around. Its absurdities are a bit more clearly defined. We share a sense of the ridiculous that seems to transcend language: a word, sometimes a glance, is enough to suggest some new buffoonery on the march. He ignites insight, in the way a good woman intensifies the emotional climate. We spent the evening raking over the Johnson administration, the Bible-thumpers who are citing chapter and

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verse against the Freedom Riders, and the latest academic notion that everyone's opinion is equally valid. (Rob's not exactly big on the Freedom Riders, either. They're another example of what happens when people start taking their rights seriously.) He thinks some ballots should be weighted. Particularly his. Certainly mine. *A bonus for common sense. It's in short supply these days.*

We ate a late lunch at Bookbinder's, and retired for the evening to the Officers' Club at the Naval Base. We stayed until midnight. It strikes me that the art of conversation has gone out of the world. And Rob, in that sense, is something of an anachronism: a visitor from the nineteenth century, from an age in which there were more important things to do than to sit around and be entertained.

He'll be leaving in the morning, ten o'clock flight.

Pity.

Philadelphia, Wednesday, January 9, 1974

School districts are burning Mark Twain. In California, two police officers have been sued for using unnecessary force to subdue a man who was in the act of stabbing a woman. And there's a report that a group of volunteers trying to stop watching television went through withdrawal. Anyone who worries that the U.S. is headed for collapse can relax. It is raining on the rubble.

Terri Hauser has begun suggesting that Sammy needs a mother. Truth is, he probably does, but that seems to me to be a weak foundation for a marriage. I know she would move in if I suggested it. But where would *that* end?

Post Office returned Rob's Christmas card today, stamped MOVED —FORWARDING PERIOD EXPIRED.

Philadelphia, Friday, November 2, 1979

Rob is back.

There've been a few changes in his life. He's living in Seattle now. And he's gotten married. They are here on one of these Amtrak plans where you ride all over the country. Her name is Anne, and she is from Vermont. The plan is that she will go up to visit her folks for a few days, and Rob will stop off here. I wonder if he will be able to figure out some use for this home computer I've bought. I thought I might be able to get it to do my taxes, but they keep changing the laws every year.

Philadelphia, Sunday, November 4, 1979

The train was late getting in. I had to hang around 30th Street Station two hours. But it was good to see him again. Been a lot of years. We came back here, got settled, and then went to the Berlinhaus up on the

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Boulevard for some sauerbraten. Lots of talk about a sex poll that was released yesterday, indicating that women are as adulterous as men. We tried to imagine how it might be possible to poll people about their sexual habits and come up with anything close to valid results. The Ayatollah also took his lumps. *What do you suppose it would be like to sit down with him for coffee?*

Later in the evening, we stopped by Janet's place. She'd asked to meet Rob, and that went pretty well too. We probably drank a little too much. But I don't think I've ever seen Janet enjoy herself so much.

Rob has gone completely gray since the last time I saw him. Otherwise, he doesn't seem to have lost much ground.

Incidentally, toward the end of the evening at the Berlinhaus, someone at the next table overheard us talking about Khomeini and asked whether we'd heard that the Iranians had seized the embassy in Teheran?

It was true, of course. They've taken fifty or sixty hostages. State Department isn't sure yet how many. It must be a first of some kind: nobody *ever* seizes diplomatic people. Even Hitler didn't do that. It's what happens when you put an amateur in charge of a government.

Well, they'll release everybody tomorrow. And apologize. If we behave according to past practice, we'll lodge a stiff protest and go back to business as usual.

Philadelphia, Monday, November 5, 1979

Another delay with the train this morning, but Rob finally got away. This time, we've agreed to get together again soon.

The Iranian government claims it has no control over the students who've taken the embassy. Rob thinks we should give the Ayatollah a list of targets and start destroying them one by one until the government discovers it *can* do something to release our people. I'm not sure that isn't the best way to handle it.

Question: what should our primary objective be? To get the hostages released? Or to act in such a way that future hostage-takers will think it over before trying the same thing?

Philadelphia, Tuesday, September 7, 1982

Rob's marriage has collapsed. I had no idea it was in trouble. He doesn't talk much about his personal life, and of course over a telephone you don't really get to see anything. He's obviously shaken. I got the impression *he* didn't see it coming either. I suggested he might take some time and come here, but he says he'll be fine. I'm sure he will.

I never really got to meet her.

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Seattle, Tuesday, January 8, 1986

We've lost a shuttle. And a crew.

Grim day. I'd been looking forward to this trip for a long time. Rob picked me up at the airport, and we stopped for lunch on the way out to his place. The waitress told us about *Challenger*.

Rob looked at me very strangely, and I knew what he was thinking, of course. We'd been able to get together *four* times over the course of a quarter-century. And three of those occasions had been marred by a major American disaster. There had been far greater catastrophes in the world during the period, in terms of body count. But we seemed to be tuned to a *local* wave length.

Neither of us said much. Until we heard the details, we hoped that the crew might have been able to survive, although it was difficult to visualize any kind of shuttle explosion that one could walk away from.

Philadelphia, Wednesday, March 4, 1987

. . . (Madeline and I) were talking about the various ways in which minuscule events produce results out of all proportion. Like the short cut through a park that generates an accidental meeting that ends in a marriage. One of the Kennedy assassination theories holds that Lee Oswald shot down the President because Marina Oswald indicated a sexual preference for *him* over her inadequate husband.

Madeline said she'd heard once that a butterfly, moving its wings in Africa under the right conditions, could produce a hurricane in the Caribbean. Interesting conceit.

Philadelphia, Sunday, December 18, 1988

Rob called today. *He'll be in the area Wednesday. Did I think we could manage dinner without provoking an international crisis?*

I explained that I won't be able to pick him up at the airport because I'm booked at the office. He will take a cab.

Philadelphia, Wednesday, December 21, 1988

It's happened again: A London to New York flight with more than two hundred people disintegrated over Scotland while Rob and I sat in a restaurant out on the Main Line.

I'm spooked.

So is he.

Philadelphia, Thursday, December 22, 1988

People died on the ground as well. The photographs from Locherbie, the crash site, are just too much. I stayed away from the TV most of the night. I've got Dickens beside me, but I can't keep my mind on it. They

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are saying now that it looks as if there was a bomb on board. How can people be so evil?

And we were together again.

Kennedy.

The Embassy.

Challenger.

Flight 103.

Here's to us.

Rob left on an afternoon flight. We tried to calculate odds, but neither of us is mathematician enough to be able even to frame the problem. Rob, who is ordinarily a world-class skeptic, wondered whether it was possible that we might sense oncoming disaster? And huddle together against the storm? I told him about Madeline's butterfly.

Has it happened every time?

We both thought so. But I went back through this diary tonight. We got safely through a meal August 7, 1964.

One exception to the pattern.

The bond between my father and Orin Robinson grew closer, possibly as a result of the curious intersections between their quiet reunions and the series of historic disasters. They came to refer to this trend as the *Tradition*. Their phone conversations became more frequent. They discounted their alarm on the night of the Locherbie flight. Absurd, they said, to think they could be connected. And anyway there was, after all, the exception to the general pattern. *Thank God for 1964*. That phrase became their watchword.

It was during this period that my father engaged in his brief flirtation with Catholicism. Rob was horrified, but took the position that it was his responsibility to stand by my father during his aberration.

There were still occasional echoes of the Tradition in the diary. . . .

Washington, D.C., Tuesday, February 4, 1992

. . . . Visited the Eternal Flame today. It is a lovely and sober spot. How does it happen that the shots fired in Dallas so long ago still hurt?

If Rob and I had not run into each other in Minneapolis that day, and gone to lunch, is it at all possible it might not have happened? Does that make any kind of sense at all?

Portland, Oregon, Saturday, December 12, 1992

The (dental) convention's a bit dry. But I got together tonight with some of the guys from Chicago, and we went over to Margo's. It's a topless place, and I guess it's a sign you're getting old when you wish they'd move so you could see the basketball game.

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I would have enjoyed getting together with Rob. But we let it go this time, more or less by mutual consent.

Philadelphia, Tuesday, June 14, 1994

. . . . Rob confessed tonight that he has been east any number of times over the last few years, but has not mentioned it to me. *It's dumb to behave as if we have been doing something dangerous.*

He's right, of course.

I'll be in New York this weekend. I could get down for dinner.

I keep thinking about the butterfly.

"Listen, how about a change of venue?"

Okay. What do you have in mind?

"I don't know. Something more exotic than Philly."

Why don't we meet in Atlantic City?

"Yeah. Sounds good."

Dinner by the sea.

Be nice to see him again. And the world looks quiet. Here's to us.

Philadelphia, Wednesday, June 15, 1994

I'll be glad when it's over. . . .

Philadelphia, Friday, June 17, 1994

Rob tomorrow. I cannot imagine what life would have been like without him. Yet I've seen so little of him.

As the whole world knows, the meteor fell at 7:22 P.M. on the 18th of June. Possibly just as they were sitting down to dinner.

I've read through these passages until I have them by heart, and I can offer no explanation. The correlation between meetings and catastrophe is necessarily coincidence because it can't be anything else.

But there's one more point: I've gone back and looked closely at August 7, 1964. The exception to the Tradition.

Robinson and my father were wrong: there *was* a disaster on that day. But its nature was less immediately cataclysmic than the other events, so it's easy to see why it might have passed unnoticed.

In the late afternoon of that date, the Congress, with only two negative votes, approved the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

We didn't know it at the time, but the United States had formally entered the Vietnam War. ●

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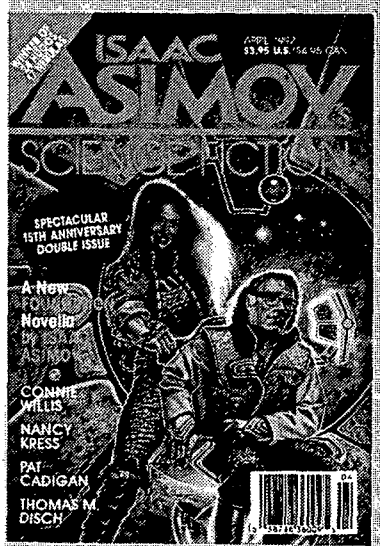
THIS YEAR ENTER ANOTHER DIMENSION.



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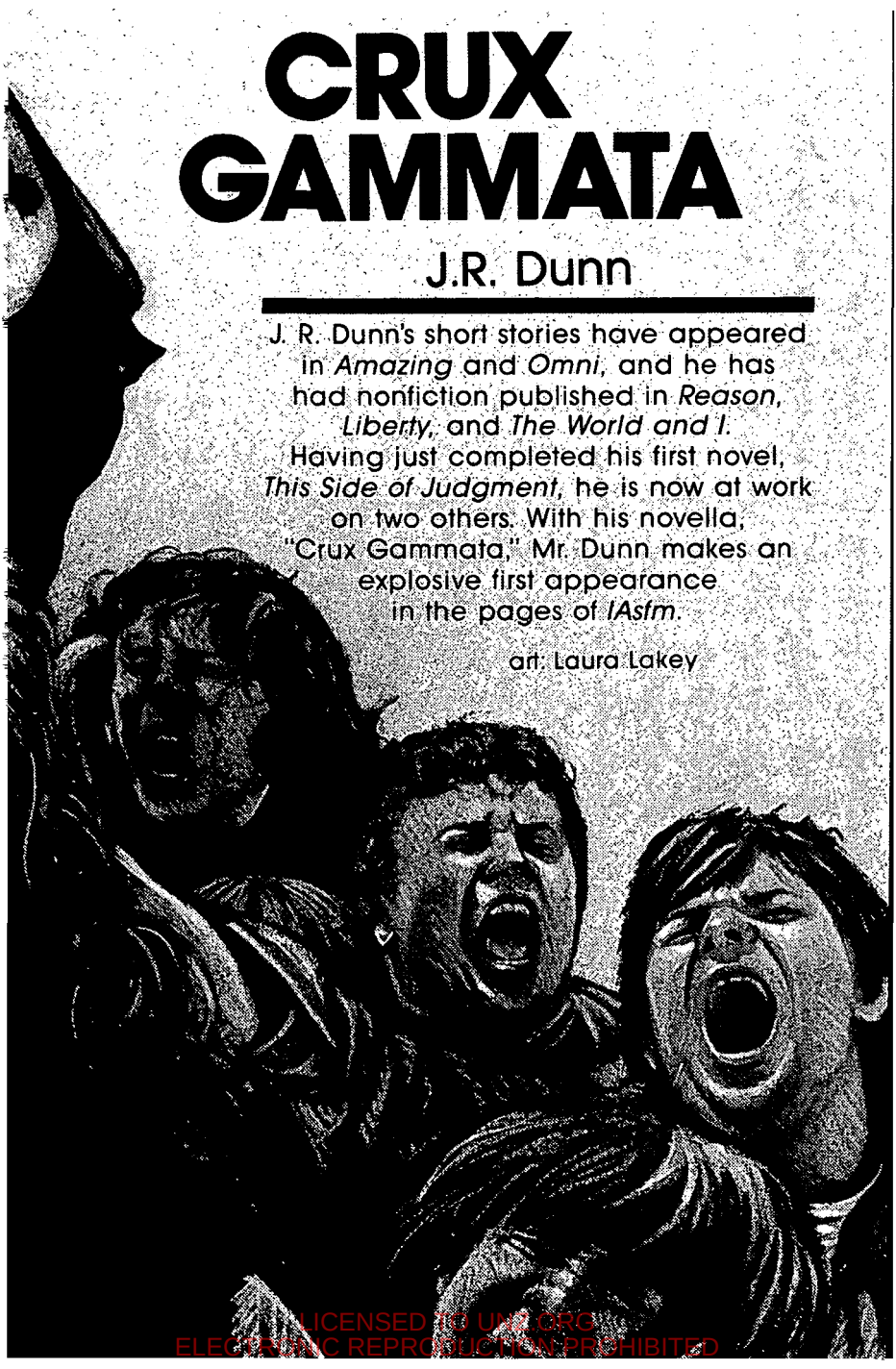
CRUX GAMMATA

J.R. Dunn

J. R. Dunn's short stories have appeared in *Amazing* and *Omni*, and he has had nonfiction published in *Reason*, *Liberty*, and *The World and I*. Having just completed his first novel, *This Side of Judgment*, he is now at work on two others. With his novella, "Crux Gammata," Mr. Dunn makes an explosive first appearance in the pages of *IAsfm*.

art: Laura Lakey



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"One swastika, that's all."

Crawford leaned forward, giving all his attention to Mosley, even though he knew that Mos didn't handle cover shots. That was my department.

"I know you don't want to look like trendies," Crawford went on. "I'm aware of that. But a lot of the kids are into it, particularly the rockers, your audience. And anyway, it'll be a live album, recorded in the Reich. They're bound to have flags up over the stage. We use a standard live shot, and it'll just be there, like it was an accident. . . ."

He kept piling on the words, as if they'd overwhelm any doubts by sheer volume. I was getting disgusted. Crawford had been managing us for what, five years now? And he still didn't know how to talk to Mos. It occurred to me, watching him, that he was scared of Jake still, after all these years.

I glanced at Mos to see how he was taking it. He sat unmoving, a pair of black Ray-Bans hiding his eyes, with a half-smile that could mean anything. He turned toward me. "Steve?"

Crawford shut up, though I could see he was eager to go on with his pitch. I shrugged. "We could think about it."

Mos turned his head back to Crawford, minutely. "We'll think about it."

"Okay," Crawford said, ignoring me once again. "We could have two shots, too, you know. One with, one without. If things get hot, we switch 'em. Then we could play the censorship angle. . . ."

"Richie," Mos said, his voice quiet. Crawford went silent. The shades regarded him for a moment before Mos spoke again. "We'll think about it."

Crawford sat back, a sickly grin on his face. "Right," he said as he got up. He stood there acting as if he didn't know what to do with his hands, finally rubbing them on his jeans. "Okay, Mos. Talk about it after we land, huh?"

Mos nodded, and Crawford walked off toward the rear of the plane. I followed him with my eyes until he was out of earshot. "Asshole," I said. "Jesus, I hate it when he gets like that."

Mos took the glasses off. "Does like to talk," he said, smiling down at the lenses.

I'd actually been referring to the scared-rat thing, but I let it ride.

Mos nested the glasses on top of his head. He had his hair tied back in a ponytail, as he usually did when there weren't any cameras around. "Man's got a case of gammadion fever," he said finally.

"What?"

The smile broadened. "The gammadion, Steve. Crux gammata, the twisted cross."

"Oh," I said, a little stupidly. Leave it to Mosley to know all that weird shit.

"Ancient symbol of power, far back as anybody's ever looked."

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"That why they use it?" I said, nodding toward the front of the plane, as if old Goering himself were piloting it.

"Who knows," Mos said. He got that look on his face, distant and closed, as if he were thinking about something so deep it couldn't be touched. "What do you think?"

"About using a swastika on the cover? I don't know, Mos."

"Why not? We saw a lot of them on the last tour."

That we had. Armbands, T-shirts, flags. Sometimes even full uniforms: jackboots, military shirts, Sam Browne belts. It was a new thing. Where it came from, I didn't know. People were saying it was a reaction to the hippie era, but I doubted that. Stuff like that would have gotten you jailed when I was a kid back in the '50s.

Mosley eyed me patiently, his face expressionless, blue eyes blank, what a reviewer had once called "the look of a professional killer sizing up his victim." Despite myself, I looked away. "It's kind of sleazy, man."

"So? A lot of people say rock's sleazy to start with."

I turned back to him. "It's a different kind of sleaze."

"Is it?" Mos said. "Then what are we doing on a Nazi SST headed for Europe?"

I gaped at him. He'd got me again. Mos could always do it, no matter what it was about. "You son of a bitch," I said.

He threw his head back and laughed, the Mos nobody ever saw outside of the band.

"Goddamn it," I said.

"Don't worry about it, Steve," Mos said. He slipped the glasses down and put the seat back. "We'll figure something else. Old Glory, maybe." He relaxed and I could see his eyes close. A minute later he was asleep. Mos could sleep anywhere, anytime. Not me. Sometimes I was up all night, even when I wasn't high.

I looked out the window. We were sitting near the front of the plane, well ahead of the wing, but there wasn't much to see. No clouds, only the gray-blue of the Atlantic, and we were too high for any details.

Old Glory. Not likely we'd use that. One of our early songs had been about the flag, "Bonewhite Bloodred Blues," a song Mos had written about the China Conflict. He'd been over there, drafted right out of high school, a fact that didn't appear in any bios although everybody seemed to know about it anyway. There'd been a big stink about that song, even though it had only been a B side, and it had been pulled off the air by most stations. Didn't make any difference, the record went gold anyway.

A stewardess came down the aisle, blond, her hair up in that weird old-fashioned way they wear it in Germany, like something out of the last century. She was in uniform, a tight tailored thing a shade darker than the ocean below, buttoning up to a military collar. Nice bod, but brrr. . . .

She wasn't wearing an armband, no sign of a . . . what had Mos called it? But no, there it was, on the wings pinned to her blouse: black on

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white, the way it appeared on the flags. Symbol of the thousand year Reich, forty years old now, with quite a few to go.

I glanced up at her face. She'd seen me looking and had assumed, naturally enough, that it wasn't at her insignia. She gave me a cold, blue-eyed glare set off by reddened cheeks. I straightened in the seat, willing to explain myself, but by that time her eyes had snapped forward and she'd stalked on past.

I sank back down again. Nazis were such prudes. They'd told us that at the hotel at Idlewild before we took off, as if we didn't know. A briefing by two guys from State, anxious to make sure that us crazed rock 'n' rollers wouldn't cause a diplomatic incident, disgrace the US or start World War III. They were having second thoughts, that had been clear from their expressions, especially after Andy and Gooch started singing *"Deutschland, Deutschland, Uber Alles."*

I still didn't know whose idea it had been to have a rock band tour the Reich, the Nazis' or the feds'. Both were pretty unlikely; the Nazis had spent years trumpeting rock as a prime example of democratic decadence—in fact they'd done an article on us back in the '60s, for some reason concentrating on me instead of Mosley—so I couldn't see them actually requesting us. But the same went for our side; the picture of some three-piecer enthusiastically pushing Roadhouse to a delegation of stiff-necked zipperheads didn't quite gel either. Well, who knew and who cared.

It was part of a cultural exchange program they'd worked out, a by-product of the thaw between the US and the Reich, what the Nazis called *die Entspannung*. Kennedy had suggested it at the summit conference in the Azores, a "chance for our people to get to know each other" or something. They'd so far sent over an acrobatic team, a military choir, and an operatic outfit; we'd sent a circus, an art exhibit (not what they called "decadent art"; Rockwell), and now Roadhouse.

I recalled that Bobby'd had bands play at some of his rallies during the last campaign. Maybe he'd thought it up.

How they'd decided on us was less of a mystery. The Reich had set down a lot of rules as to what they'd allow. No Jews, of course, no blacks—they were *untermenschen* too, you know—and nobody guilty of "perverse behavior," which covered a lot of ground. That cut out Dylan, who was in retirement anyway, BS&T, Cooper, the Mothers, and don't even mention Hendrix or Arthur Lee.

State had put up a few barriers of its own—nobody with relatives who'd died during the war and nobody with a criminal record. "The war" meant the Naval War during the early '40s, not the China Conflict or any of the other border stuff since, and that didn't affect many people. The last bit put Morrison out of the running, due to that Miami thing, and the Airplane and Dead for the drug busts.

So it had come down to us. When I heard, I wasn't too happy. There'd been an uproar after the tour was announced; *Crossroads* had run an

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editorial condemning it and some of the old folkies declared they'd never go even though nobody'd asked them.

But it wasn't that, it was just the idea of playing for those kind of people, under that kind of system. Everything you heard since you were a kid, about the Gestapo, the prison camps, the way they'd sent all the Jews east to God only knew where. Not that I gave a damn about what happened in Europe, but still . . .

It hadn't been up to me, though. When they'd asked Mos, he'd just smiled and said, "Why not?"

So here we were, on a Heinkel 480 flying east across the Atlantic. A plane, I recalled, that had a swastika painted right on the tail.

So what, I thought. The US was no paradise either. We had the Klan, and look at what the government had done to the Bundists after the war . . .

And anyway, it was only six dates.

It was raining when we landed at the London flughafen, the new one they'd built over the ruins south of the river. Not heavy, just a slow drizzle that looked as if it had been coming down for decades and wouldn't stop until some time into the next century. I got up as the plane taxied to the terminal and went back to see to Andy and Gooch—they'd had a few during the flight and were giving the stewardess a hard time. Rhythm sections are always trouble—I'd heard the same from other bands. It's standard for a group to be led by the guitarist or singer, who handle press, PR, scheduling, hassles with the record company and the rest of the bullshit, leaving drums and bass with no responsibilities offstage and nothing to do but drink, drug, get laid, and generally raise hell.

Still, they were the backbone. Mos doesn't play anything except a little acoustic, and never onstage, and I'm really not that great a guitarist—live, anyway. I can keep up with anybody in the studio. So it was Andy and Gooch who carried the weight where it mattered. Not that I ever let them know it.

I got 'em shut up and out the door into the access tube, giving an apologetic nod to the stewardess, who wasn't having any. Ray, our keyboardist, had already gotten off. He was new, had joined the band only a year ago after we'd decided to expand our live sound. He was still a little ill at ease with the rest of us—hired hand syndrome.

I glanced back to see Mos getting up. He stretched, grabbed his sheepskin jacket and walked toward the exit. I turned and went out myself.

I blinked as I reached the waiting room, wishing that I'd worn a pair of shades. The room was overlarge and overbright, designed to impress. Enormous windows curved above me, with spotlights in the ceiling glaring down leaving no shadows. The walls were gray, with a carved eagle surmounting a swastika the only decoration. I studied it, feeling that I was going to get awful tired of that symbol awful quickly.

Just ahead Crawford was burbling to a couple of obvious government

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types. One I tagged as a Nazi right away; slicked-back hair, expensive double-breasted suit of the type you only see in Bogie movies in the US and a leather trenchcoat slung over his arm. The other was short, broad-faced, dressed in a much cheaper suit—evidently an English party member, what they called an umbrella man over here.

No one else was in sight. Some embassy people were supposed to meet us but there was no sign of them. I looked around. Mos was staring out the windows at the runways, lips pursed. The rest of the band was standing in a clump a few feet behind me, Andy and Gooch both looking at me as if mildly concerned about how I was going to behave.

I stepped up to Crawford. He was in his element, suave and controlled, going on about the great privilege we'd been given, dividing his attention equally between the two of them. After a minute he became aware that I was standing next to him. Putting his hand on my shoulder he pushed me forward. "And this is Steve Webb, our lead player."

The man in the expensive suit looked me over, a quick smirk appearing and vanishing. I suppressed an urge to look down at myself. Not that I was dressed in any bizarre fashion—high-heeled boots, black jeans, a red western shirt and a leather jacket, nothing that would get a second glance in the States. But it came to me how weird I must look to them and for a moment I felt damn silly.

He paused just long enough to make a point of it, then held out his hand. "Mr. Webb," he said as we shook. "Gunther Hoth, Ministry of Culture." I nodded without saying anything. As he stepped back his eyes tracked to one side and a ghost of the smirk reappeared. The earring or the hair, I wondered?

I turned to the other one, who was waiting eagerly with his hand already raised. "Terence Plunkett," he said, pumping my hand as if it were the last link between this world and eternity. His deep brogue stopped me for a minute until I remembered that the Nazis had brought over a lot of Irish to help them run England. "Pleased to meet you," I told him.

Crawford was calling to Mos. He was still at the window, jacket slung over his shoulder. For a moment he acted as if he hadn't heard, then he turned around and without a pause walked over. He stopped in front of Hoth and stared at him, still wearing the sunglasses. Hoth gazed back, his smile growing a bit strained. I wondered if Mos had caught the business between Hoth and me—he had a way of doing that, of noticing things you were sure he'd missed. Finally he raised his hand. They shook once, saying nothing. Then, with a nod to Plunkett, Mos stepped away.

Crawford had the rest of the band lined up by then and in a moment the introductions were finished. Rubbing his hands together, Plunkett said, "Well now, I hope you had a good flight?"

"It was all right . . ." I said.

"Fine, fine." Plunkett said. "Now, Gunther and myself will be what you would call hosts during your time here. Anything you need, just drop

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us the word, though I hope you'll find the arrangements will be quite satisfactory. Now, the cars are waiting right outside. . . ."

"Uh," I said. "I thought some people from our embassy would be here. . . ."

"Quite true," Hoth said. "They've been delayed, unfortunately. There's much construction going on, and in this rain. . . ." He shook his head. "You'll be able to speak to them at the hotel. You have several free hours."

I frowned. "Free hours? What does that mean?"

"Why, before your show, of course," Hoth said. He put a slight but definite emphasis on "show."

"Wait a second," I said. "The first date isn't scheduled until tomorrow. We need a day to mellow out, get over jet lag, check the equipment. . . ."

Hoth's eyebrows went up. "Surely you were informed. There is a rally celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the victory of Stalingrad on Monday, and the auditorium must be prepared."

"What the fuck, man," I heard Gooch say behind me. Hoth stared back calmly.

I swung around to Crawford. "Richie," I said, keeping my voice low. He looked at me, wide-eyed, then flapped his hands in front of him. "Steve, I swear, this is as new to me as it is . . ."

"Gentlemen," Hoth said. I turned back to him. "Why this sudden panic? Your sound equipment arrived early this morning. It's being set up as we speak, with the aid of our own technicians. I assure you it will be ready." He was frowning, intent on explaining a matter of import to borderline idiots. "As for yourselves, I have already pointed out that you have the afternoon free. Surely this can't be any real challenge to professional musicians?"

I looked toward the ceiling, letting out a long breath preparatory to explaining matters to him when Mos spoke.

"It's all right," he said. I turned to him. He'd taken his glasses off and was looking at the carpet—gray, like the rest of the room—with a quiet smile on his face. "They've got to have their celebration." He raised his head, the smile intact. "Stalingrad." He paused a moment, his eyes far away. "A famous victory."

"That it was, Mr. Mosley," Hoth said, his face blank.

Mos nodded. "Right," he said, turning to Plunkett. "Well, let's go."

Plunkett hesitated, looking over at Hoth, then wordlessly turned to lead the way. Hoth fell in step with him, smiling coldly. We followed, and behind me I heard muttering from Andy and Gooch as we walked through the terminal, gray, monumental, and nearly empty.

". . . so they taxied the plane to the end of the field and left us there," Shenk said. "They had a truck next to the runway filled with these goddamn guards wearing black uniforms and boots. One of 'em at the door wouldn't let us out. I'll tell ya, man, I had a hard time keeping the

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crew from going after 'em. Specially Willy. That boy wanted to kick some ass."

I nodded and took another sip of brandy. We were at the hotel, the Nurnberger, and it was getting on to midnight. I was beat, but it was the first chance I'd had to talk to Shenk or anybody else in the crew.

The show had been a disaster. We'd gone on without a complete sound check, after a warmup consisting of a fat comic telling jokes in thick German that I didn't need translated to know were directed at us.

We were mad enough to really stomp, but the equipment and the audience beat us. First the bass amp went, then Mos's mike, then mine, and so on down the line. Shenk and the boys did yeoman work but they couldn't keep up with it. On top of that, my Strat kept going out of tune. I'd expected that; England is a lot more humid than Southern Cal at the best of times, but I'd thought there'd be a couple of days to acclimate. So I switched to the Custom, even though I'd changed strings that afternoon. Didn't help as far as the tuning went, of course, but I just said fuck it and played the notes where I found them.

The crowd—well, they were plain weird, as bad as I'd expected, if not worse. We'd demanded open seating in the contract, so that the common people would be able to get decent seats, but the Krauts had given that the same respect they'd shown the schedule.

Not many of them were actually in uniform, but they may as well have been. The first few rows were filled with old farts, British or German, I couldn't tell, dressed in the same kind of out-of-date suit that Hoth had worn, with their wives—they must have been their wives—in gowns and fancy dresses. A few rows back they started turning younger, though you wouldn't have been able to guess it from what they were wearing.

It was in the back, mostly in the balconies, that the real crowd was. Peering through the lights I could barely make them out, regular kids, not much different from those at home, though they seemed a lot smaller and not nearly as well dressed. What response we got came from them; whistles, a few shouts, prolonged applause at some of the better-known singles. The first few rows just clapped politely at the end of each number—they'd even done it when the lead mike went out. After awhile I started playing to the rear and ignoring everybody else. I guess we all did.

It wasn't until the end of the set—a short one, only a dozen songs—that I noticed the dark shapes in the aisles, dozens of them, rushing quickly to any spot that got noisy. There were none in the front.

". . . about two hours. Then they took us to a goddamn hangar and hustled us over to the auditorium. Didn't even give us a chance to shower."

"Same treatment we got, Ken. Though they didn't make us wait."

Shenk shook his head. "Bastards. Oh, and they made us go through passport control at the hangar. I thought that was supposed to be taken care of?"

He paused but I just rolled my eyes.

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"Yeah," he laughed. "Well, the SOB that checked mine opened it and says, 'Achhh, Shenk, gut Gerrrman name.' I felt like telling him it was Jewish."

I managed to swallow the brandy I'd been sipping before splattering it all over myself. Shenk killed his beer. "But not quite," he said, then leaned closer. "Listen, Steve, is the whole goddamn tour gonna be like this? Cause if it is . . . I don't know, man. I can control Willy and the rest of 'em, but really . . ."

"No way, Kenny." I shook my head. "I'd have had it out with Hoth tonight, but he ain't around." Hoth had been there for the show but had pretty much vanished when he'd seen what mood we were in when we came off. It was Plunkett who'd brought us to the hotel, but then he'd evaporated himself. "They keep up this shit, we'll cut our losses. We're not Reich citizens. We can go home."

"I hear you." He crushed the beer can as he got up. I noticed it was a Bud, even though there were a lot of German brands on the table. "Well, time for another. I need it tonight."

"I'll tell you, though," he said over his shoulder. "I meet one more punk in the States wearing a swastika. . . ." He shook his head.

"Same here," I said, then raised the glass and swirled it, taking a sniff of the fumes. Excellent stuff, Napoleon, aged for decades. They'd given us a good spread, that I had to admit. The table at the far end of the suite was loaded up, good liquor, plenty of beer and food, both German and American. Old-style Deutsch hospitality overcoming Nazi asceticism.

I finished the brandy and glanced around the room. Gooch and Andy were in a corner, half-blitzed and talking trash. Mos was sitting on a sofa, barefoot but still wearing the rest of his stage gear, leather pants and white peasant shirt. Crawford was sitting next to him, stuffing his face. "See," he waved a fork at Mos. "They're not that bad. The date wasn't their fault. We can get along . . ."

There was a burst of laughter and I looked over to see Ray going through an elaborate pantomime that I realized had to be Plunkett. I smiled. Amazing how much he loosened up once he had a few.

Willy and the rest of the crew, a photographer, a couple of guys from the recording team. Aside from that the suite was empty. No groupies, of course, even though I tried to control that back home, at least keeping the real skags out. No women at all, in fact: we'd left our tour coordinator, Ronnie, back in the States. A real pity. She tended to keep matters civilized, and she'd wanted to see Paris.

And no dope either. I'd told everybody to leave their smoke home; you could get in real deep shit for that kind of thing over here. It was one of my nightmares that Willy or one of the crew had decided that an oz. or two wouldn't hurt. Particularly Willy; he half lived on reefer.

I was getting up for another glass when there was a knock on the door. Crawford hopped up to open it. A couple guys in suits walked in, followed by another in a safari jacket. I felt my jaw tighten and put down my

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glass. I'd nearly reached them before I realized they weren't German; the suits were American style, narrow cut with flared pants.

The guy in the lead smiled as his eyes reached me. He stepped over, the others close behind. "John D'Alessio," he said. "From the embassy."

I slowly lifted my hand and shook his. "Nice of you to stop by," I said, keeping my voice cool.

He dropped his eyes and put his hands on his hips, pushing the jacket back as he did. He was thin, but in an athletic sort of way, with curly hair and a prominent nose thick at the bridge, as if he'd once been a boxer. "Look," he said, "I'm sorry. They've been giving us the runaround for the last twelve hours. They're good at that. Didn't find out what hotel you were at until half an hour ago. We nearly didn't get past the guard at the elevator just now . . ."

"They put a guard here?"

He met my eyes, nodded. "You think they wouldn't?"

I looked away, confused. For a second he seemed about to add something, then he shrugged and went on. "I hear it's been just as bad for you."

I gave him a short laugh. "You ain't shitting."

"Well, that's what we're here to talk about." He glanced over to where Mos was sitting. "Should I speak to you, or . . ."

I was a little surprised that he knew that I ran most of the band business. "No, Mos had better hear it, too."

"Okay," D'Alessio said. I turned to lead him across the room.

"Oh, I saw the show, by the way," D'Alessio said. "They wouldn't let us backstage until you left."

"What did you think?" I said without turning around.

"Well . . ." He paused for a minute. "Let's put it this way. I was at Saratoga during your '68 tour. Now that was a concert."

I looked back at him. He was grinning broadly at me. Touché. I smiled in return. Goddamit, but we had fans in the weirdest places. The "thinking man's rock band" for sure.

Gooch had meandered over to join Mos and was sitting on the arm of the couch, half in the bag. ". . . bullshit, Mos," he was saying. "This just ain't a rockin' country. You see them tonight? Sittin' on their friggin' hands. . . ."

"Some of them," Mos said. "But I don't think they were British."

"Aw, get outta here." Gooch waved his beer bottle. A Heineken, I noticed. I'd seen the little swastikas on the label earlier on. "Bunch of tea-drinkers. They don't know how to boogie. I bet not one decent band would have come out of England even if the nazzis hadn't whipped 'em."

"I don't know, Gooch. Townshend's pretty good."

Gooch reared back, offended. "Townshend's a Canuck."

Mos shook his head. "British, Gooch. His folks came over in the Great Convoy."

Gooch stuck the bottle in his mouth and contemplated that as I moved in. "Mos," I said, "Couple guys from the embassy. They want to talk."

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Looking them over, Mos nodded and rose. I made the introductions and led everybody to a bedroom that wasn't being used. Behind us Gooch slumped onto the couch. "*Tommy*'s a shitty record anyway," I heard him mutter.

As we passed the table I stopped and asked D'Alessio if they wanted anything. He paused and turned to the others. "The brandy's good," I told him.

He shrugged and poured himself a glass, as did the other guy in the suit. I did the same. Mos and the one in the safari jacket took nothing.

We went into the bedroom and shut the door; what noise there was from the party cut off immediately. The room was large, but there weren't a lot of chairs. I grabbed one, a fussy, insubstantial looking thing, turned it to face the bed and sat down. D'Alessio perched on the edge of the bed along with the other suit. The one in the Hemingway jacket remained standing. I looked over at Mos. He was leaning against the dresser, arms crossed. I wondered what he was feeling. I assumed he was pissed about things but it was hard to tell; I hadn't had a chance to talk to him since the show. Onstage he'd been completely pro, but that was all; there had been none of the fire that he had when he was on. No athletic leaps, no mike twirling, no byplay with the audience. He had a cool, distant expression on his face now, but that meant nothing: nobody was better than Mosley at hiding what he felt.

I turned back to D'Alessio. He'd taken a swig of the brandy and was leaning forward, glass cupped in his hands. "Okay," he said, "I'm sure you want to know what's going on . . ."

"Be nice," Mos said behind me.

D'Alessio went on as if he hadn't heard. "First thing: all this is speculation, everything in the Reich is wheels within wheels. But," he paused for a moment. "We're sure it has something to do with Hitlerjugend. You may have heard they weren't too happy about von Marck becoming chancellor. . . ."

"I knew they rioted," I said.

"Right," D'Alessio said. "They don't have any mechanism to assure a smooth transfer of power. When Hitler died in '53 . . ."

I remembered it all from when I was a kid. Goebbels' "accident", Heydrich and Himmler tried for treason, Fat Hermann—too powerful to knock off, with his Luftwaffe and bureaucratic connections—biding his time under genteel house arrest in Bavaria, and finally Bormann on top, where he'd stayed for four years until the '58 coup. "We know all that," I said. "Go on."

A glance from D'Alessio, then he resumed speaking. "Okay. Now von Marck is a Nazi, but an old Junker as well. That immediately pits him against the party ideologues—one of Hitler's major goals was the destruction of the Prussian aristocracy. So I don't have to tell you that he's got a hard row to hoe."

D'Alessio bent over further, his eyes intent. "But what's important is that he supports detente. There are plenty of elements who want to hew

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to the Goebbels-Bormann line; complete the revolution, total national socialism, cold war with the Alliance—which for all practical purposes is us. The worst of them is the Jugendbund. Nobody ever predicted it but they've developed into one of the core power centers. Obvious when you think about it: everyone in the Reich is a member all through school, and they go on to wherever: SS, government, military. . . ."

"So what does this have to do with us?" I said.

"Well, to start, the tour coordinator you've got now wasn't the one originally assigned. Hoth replaced him just three days ago. And Hoth's a Jugend boy from way back."

"That doesn't mean . . ."

D'Alessio raised his hand. "Let me finish. The exchange program is an artifact of detente, that's obvious. It'd be a blow to von Marck if it was to collapse—and the collapse was seen to come from our end. A minor thing, maybe, but it all counts as far as they're concerned."

I thought about it. Roadhouse a deciding factor in a Nazi power play. Mos's vocals heralding a new dawn for the Reich. The Cold War freezing up again due to Webb's lousy guitar playing. Right. "Look, man . . ."

"One more thing," D'Alessio said. "You know we've got an art exhibit touring Europe?"

I nodded. "Rockwell, I think."

"That's it. Well, two days ago one of the paintings was slashed in the Louvre—some nut Frenchman, no apparent connection to the party, needless to say." He paused, grimacing a bit. "It happens that the painting was the one about the Brown decision—the little black girl being led into school by the marshals. We tried to persuade Rockwell not to include it but he insisted. Since it happened, the papers have been going apeshit—saying that the painting was a deliberate incitement to race-mixing, a symbol of US decadence, and so on." He raised his eyebrows.

I slumped in the seat. So they wanted a scandal. Well, there were a lot of bands who'd be happy to give it to them. The kind of stuff that new groups go in for—lots of dope, tearing up hotel rooms, battling cops. Not necessarily new ones either—I thought of the kind of thing Jerry Lee was always pulling; hell, he'd have been chased back home in a New York minute. True, we'd done our share of it too, a few years back—I suddenly felt uneasy about Andy and Gooch, brewing it up in the other room. I could picture them launching a couch out a window, with Plunkett or Hoth telling them it was okay. . . . No, not in that room; no windows.

I realized that I was pulling the hair at the back of my head, a stupid habit I'd never been able to break. I dropped my hand and turned back to D'Alessio. "You're saying they want us to fuck up."

D'Alessio nodded.

I shook my head. "Won't happen. Matter of fact, if we have another day like this one, we're history."

"That might suit 'em just fine," Mos said. I looked at him as it sunk

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in: yeah, breaking the contract and heading back home, that might be enough.

I sighed. "Okay, first thing I do tomorrow is get ahold of that asshole Hoth and tell him to straighten up . . ."

"No problem there," D'Alessio said. "We've already talked to the culture people. Hoth's a new kid and he'll have to listen to the higher-ups. I don't think you'll have any more scheduling problems."

"But we can expect others?"

He nodded. "But not to worry. We'll have embassy people keeping an eye on you. In fact, I'll be on detached duty for the length of the tour." He smiled. "So you'll be seeing a lot of us."

He waved to the other guy in the suit, who bobbed his head. "Matt Burgh, and Frank Reynolds." The guy in the safari jacket nodded, and I took a close look at him for the first time. Early forties, maybe, crewcut, features angular and stern. A sudden chill came over me and I looked back at D'Alessio, who was saying, "Frank's not actually attached to the embassy—he's a cameraman for NBS—but he's done a lot of work with us and he's interested in getting some footage of the tour for a documentary . . ."

That did it. D'Alessio could pass as your eager young diplomat, man on the way up, and the other one, Burgh, as just another colorless bureaucrat. But Reynolds had OCI written all over him, and that NBS bit—hell, everybody knew that the Company used journalists as cover.

I got up and took a step toward them. "Wait a second, man. We didn't agree to anything like this."

D'Alessio spoke, his voice flat. "It's not a matter of a tour anymore, Steve. And as far as agreements go, take a look at the one you signed with State. Section C, clause 3b. 'Necessary government activities'."

Turning to Mos for support, I saw that he'd stepped away from the dresser and was headed for the door. "Mos," I said, but he just shook his head and walked out.

I could feel my face redden as I watched the door close. Goddamn him. Every time something comes up that Mosley the frontman doesn't want to handle he's gone. Dump it in Webb's lap, that's what he's there for. God, but I was sick of that bullshit.

I took a deep breath and turned back to D'Alessio. He was on his feet, looking at me sympathetically, as if he'd expected this to happen.

"Goddammit," I said. "What if the Krauts find out about this?"

"You think they don't know?" D'Alessio said. "They'd do the same. And they'd consider us idiots if we didn't."

I looked away, biting my lip. "All right," I said after a moment. "Lot of choice I got. But one thing," I gestured at Reynolds. "We don't have any contract for filming, so he can walk."

D'Alessio gestured at Burgh, who opened his briefcase and began rummaging through it. "We got an okay from your record company."

Those bastards in LA. Well, they'd pay for this. The contract was

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up for renewal next year and the reps from Warners had been nosing around—yeah, then we'd see.

I glared at D'Alessio. "Look, Steve," he said. "It's not that bad. This isn't an op, you won't be in the line of fire. We're here to make sure it stays that way." He headed for the door, the other two behind him. Reynolds nodded as he walked past.

"We won't get in your way, I promise you," D'Alessio said as he reached for the knob. "Oh, and one other thing. I'd keep this quiet—Coover and Ames are a good rhythm section but . . ."

"I hear you. A couple of moron rockers who can't keep their mouths shut."

D'Alessio looked hurt. "I didn't say that, Steve."

"You said enough."

I watched the door close, then looked down and kicked at the rug—not a wall-to-wall but an honest to God rug, flower-patterned, the kind you expected to see in your old Grandma's place. The whole building had that air, old-fashioned, out of date, chintzy. At least there were no portraits of the Fuhrer around. Or had they taken them down before we'd arrived? I searched the walls for bright spots where a picture might have hung but saw nothing.

I glared back at the door, as if to catch D'Alessio and his crew peering out from behind. The Office of Central Intelligence. That pack of scumbags. Murderers, cutthroats, assassins. The American Gestapo, they were called, and they were probably nearly as bad. Not that I believed any of the wilder stories—about how they'd killed old J. Edgar or that the Kennedy clan was all OCI—but what was proven was bad enough. They'd overthrown Peron, Somoza, the Shah, and anybody else who'd shown sympathy for the Reich. They trained the warlord's armies in China, and supposedly peddled dope for them too. That I could believe; that guy Reynolds—fake name if I ever heard one—looked capable of about anything.

But there wasn't much I could do about it. The execs in LA would only whine and make excuses if they bothered to take the call and as for bitching to State—forget it. I just hoped that *Crossroads* and the other rags wouldn't get ahold of it.

And I still couldn't believe that Mos had let me down like that. Promoters, industry people, okay, but this—this was taking the Jake Mosley aloofness riff a little too far.

I went to the door and yanked it open. With some relief I saw that D'Alessio and his platoon had split; there was just Gooch and Andy draped across the couch sucking away on a couple of brews. Gooch saluted me with his bottle and yelled, "Hey, Stevie, about time you got out of my room."

I gave him as much of a smile as I could manage. "Where'd Mos run off to?"

"Mos," Gooch said with a frown, as if trying to recall where he'd come across a person of that name. "Hit the sheets, I suppose."

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I looked at the door of his room, thinking of going in and having it out with him. But that wouldn't work. Not that he'd be mad, Mos seldom lost his temper. But he knew me, knew exactly what buttons to push to make me feel like a goddamn fool. Always had, since we'd been kids. "Yeah," I said, and turned back to the couch. "Looks like the party's over. You guys better call it a night."

"Aw, what the fuck, Steve. We got two days 'til Liverpool," Gooch said.

"Yeah. And we had until tomorrow for here."

"He's right, Gooch," Andy said blearily. "Steve's right."

"Shit," Gooch got up and took a few unsteady steps. "No broads, no smoke, and Webb's chasing us away from the booze. This tour's shapin' up for a winner." At the table he snagged another beer for a nightcap and went on into his room, still muttering.

Andy made a face after him and killed his beer. "Well, what do you think, Stevie," he said as he got up. "The nazzis gonna fuck us again?"

"Was Goering a fat man?"

Andy grimaced. "Right," he said, then stumbled off without another word.

I decided against another brandy; I was too tired to enjoy it and the earlier ones had left me with a headache.

My room was a virtual duplicate of the one I'd spoken to D'Alessio in: heavy wood furniture, old-style rug, a bed that looked like it came out of a Vienna whorehouse. Leaving the light off I went to the window and pulled back the drapes. There was London, dark compared to American cities; the lights few and scattered, each probably having their exact purpose in the Reich's scheme of things. From here I could see the river and one of the bridges, black against the water except for spotlights at either end. There had been a tower there once, named after the city itself, but now it was gone, along with Parliament and the big cathedral—I couldn't remember the name. Replacing them were the ministry buildings designed by Speer, massive blocks with no character or trace of history at all.

I tried to imagine what it had been like that long-ago dawn as the Luftwaffe made its last sorties over the burning city and the airborne troops rained down from a cloudless sky, as that brave growling man had left Downing Street for the last time to lead an army of old men and children against the panzers coming up from the coast. To the north, where we would be heading tomorrow, the final ships of the Great Convoy would have been leaving the harbors, protected by the remnants of the RAF, bearing west. . . .

And here we were, thirty years later, teaching them how to boogie. I thought of Hoth's smirk this afternoon, and the dark shapes walking the aisles of the concert hall.

I shucked off my clothes and crawled into bed, but sleep wouldn't come and after a while I got up. In darkness I found the case and lifted it onto the bed. Opening it I took out a bottle and a rag and sat polishing the guitar, then swung it into my lap and tuned it. My fingers seemed to

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work on their own, picking out a few runs and scales before settling into a progression: an old blues from the thirties, a song by Robert Johnson. I let the words run through my head as the unamplified notes rang out quietly:

If I had possession over judgement day
There'd be a lot of people wouldn't have no right to pray

Hoth was subdued when I saw him the next morning as I ate breakfast. They had it set up buffet-style on the same table they'd used last night, looking nearly as impressive as what had been there then. I was half-dead and decided to stick with eggs and toast, that and a lot of coffee.

I'd nearly finished when Hoth came in. He pardoned himself for intruding, suave European gentleman to the tee, then got a cup of coffee after I grunted at him. I made him wait until I was done eating before getting down to business.

I started right in, not giving him a chance to speak. Scheduling, seating, and those goddamn guards. He listened silently, then leaned over the table. The scheduling was a one-time problem and would not recur. As for the seating, that was how tickets were sold, surely the policy was the same in the US? And the guards—they were there to preserve order, how could I object to that? Particularly considering the . . . rousing nature of the music. He'd been over this with Mr. Crawford earlier, but unfortunately Mr. Webb had still been asleep. . . . And there was some concern with Mr. Mosley's outrageous antics onstage. . . .

I stopped him right there and went back over it, ignoring what he'd said about Mos. I didn't mention the embassy; Hoth gave no sign that they'd spoken to him, and considering what I knew about D'Alessio, I didn't want to be the first to bring it up. As for Crawford, he didn't do a damn thing without checking with me, and Hoth knew that.

It took us half an hour, but I finally got something out of him: a modified seating arrangement to let some of the kids sit in front, the guards kept out of sight unless it looked as if things were really getting out of hand, something I strongly doubted would happen.

Hoth was noncommital, not actually agreeing but letting whatever I said stand. For some reason his heart didn't seem to be in it. I got very little reaction from him, even after I countered the rousing nature crack with a remark about Wagner. He didn't even mention Mos again.

It was right at the end that he brought up the topic I'd been waiting for all along. I was getting another cup of coffee when he cleared his throat and said, "I understand that there is a video unit that will be accompanying you for the rest of the tour?"

I poured a full cup, noticing the brandy bottle still on the table behind the coffee urn. I thought of adding a shot but decided against it. "That's a record company deal," I said. "I didn't know a damn thing about it. And they're not accompanying us anyplace. They can make their own arrangements as far as I'm concerned."

Hoth nodded glumly, as if I'd told him we were hopping on the next

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plane home. "We would have preferred to have been informed beforehand," he said. "So that we could have made provisions for them."

"So would I," I said as I went back to the table, keeping my voice as casual as possible.

He sat there silently, his hands clasped before him. "Perhaps it would be best," he said finally, "If this unit were to be asked not to follow the tour."

There it was, flat out. I leaned on my elbows and studied the coffee cup. "Perhaps it would be," I said, imitating his school English, giving the words some bite. "But it's out of our hands."

"A call could be made to your company. . . ."

"Look," I swiveled around to face him. "Hercules Records runs the ranch as far as PR goes . . . public relations," I said at his flash of puzzlement. "They look at it as free publicity, and they're right. If you think a goddamn record company is going to turn down a couple mil worth of that, you've got a lot to learn about capitalism, my friend."

Eyes slitted, he stared up at me. "Mr. Crawford has been much more cooperative. . . ."

"Mr. Crawford is a hired hand. He's a yes-man. You got that term in German? His job is to say 'yes' to everybody and then come to us or the company and we say 'no' nine times out of ten, then he goes back and tells them how sorry he is. That's his job, and he makes a good buck doing it." I drained the last of the coffee, wondering what the hell the silly bastard had been telling these SOBs. I got the impression he actually liked them.

I half-expected Hoth to leap to his feet and go into the kind of crazed rant you always see in the spy pictures, but he surprised me by calmly getting up and sliding the chair back under the table. "Very well," he said, and turned to the door.

"Why don't you do something about it, if you're that worried."

He paused, raising his eyebrows.

"Pull their visas, maybe. . . ."

He gave me a frosty smile. "Our countries have an agreement, Mr. Webb. All media are allowed free access to open areas with no interference."

"Oh," I said, feeling stupid. I'd heard something about that.

"Have a pleasant afternoon," Hoth said as he turned away. "I'll see you on the train."

"Right," I told the closing door, then dangled the cup on my finger. I'd handled that one real well. Superb verbal repartee, excellent marshalling of all the data. Well shit, I hadn't become a guitarist to be a goddamn diplomat. Hell with it.

I poured another cup, deciding to throw in some brandy this time to cut the cobwebs. Anyway, he'd let me off easy—I'd expected more of an interrogation; insinuations, questions about how long I'd known about the filming, and so on. If they were aware that the crew was OCI—and they had to be—that would have been natural. But he hadn't pressed it,

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and I couldn't understand why not. It was almost as if he had something else on his mind.

As I was pouring the coffee I found out what that might be. At the end of the table was a carefully stacked pile of newspapers. The top one was German, but lifting that up I found a London *Times* with an enormous headline: DISASTER AT LUNAR BASE. I stared at it a second, then thumbed through the papers to find one that wasn't a propaganda sheet. There were six of them, all European until I got to the New York *Times* at the bottom. I picked it up and took it over to the table.

It seemed that some kind of plant for processing aluminum had blown at Mondhorst Hitler, killing an unknown number of *Kosmischreisender,* wrecking some storage domes and wiping out their lander. I pursed my lips. No wonder Hoth had been so quiet. The Nazis took their moonbase pretty seriously, particularly since they'd laid claim to the whole damn ball as German territory. It was a wonder he'd even shown up at all.

I read on to get the details. The only other operational lander was at the space station being repaired and wouldn't be ready for over a week—and the SAC base at Reykjavik had picked up a radio message that the explosion had wasted most of the base's oxygen. I laid the paper down. Christ, this was no time to be running around the Reich. . . . But wait, it might be even better this way—there'd sure as hell be a lot less officials at the concerts. . . .

I was trying to think it through when a door slammed behind me and Gooch lurched out. "Yo Stevie," he said, giving me a yawn. "What's happenin'?"

I mumbled something at him. Sauntering to the table he looked over my shoulder, took in the headline and whistled. "Hotsy totsy, a hundred dead Nazis!" he crowed, shaking his fist in the air.

"Gooch, will you shut up?" I looked at him and pointed at the walls.

"Whaddaya mean," he said, swiveling his head around the room. His eyes widened as it dawned on him. "Bugs," he said, staring down at me with a manic expression. He dropped his voice to a whisper. "No shit!"

Another door swung open as I was about to go over it for him, and Andy emerged in jeans with no shirt. "Hey," he said, scratching his belly. "What's up?"

I shot him a glare and fended off Gooch, who was trying to grab the paper. Andy gave me an innocent look, then shrugged and went over to inspect the food. The suite door opened and Crawford walked in, smiling broadly, followed by Plunkett with a servile look on his face. "Hey Steve," Crawford said. "I was just talking to Gunther about the pictures and he says . . ."

"Oh, man," I said, getting up and shoving the paper under my arm. As I got to the door the Mick stepped forward eagerly. "Mr. Webb," he said, "If I can do anything for you. . . ."

I looked at him for a second, then walked out.

* * *

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I read through the rest of the paper as the cab drove me to the auditorium to check on the equipment. Not that I needed to. Shenk and the boys were pros, better than we deserved. Shenk had been with the band since nearly the beginning. He'd been studying for an electronics degree with a vague idea of going into the service and had started working for us in the summer of '67, right after "Into the Night" had broken the top ten. The Air Force had lost a good ECM tech and we'd gained a first-class sound man. I had no worries about Shenk; he'd never once let me down.

There had been a guard on our floor, sure enough, standing in front of the elevator. He hadn't given me any trouble about going out, just nodded as I'd hit the button. The cab, an English make, had been waiting when I walked out of the hotel. How long it had been there and what orders the driver had were things I didn't let bother me.

For the first few blocks I gazed out at the streets. I don't know what I'd expected but I can't say I was disappointed. It was easy to tell who the ordinary people were—they were badly dressed, small and had a lost air, walking quickly, eyes forward, not looking around, saying no more than a word or two when they passed each other. Every now and then I saw one of the conquerors—or somebody working with them, it was hard to make out the difference—on foot as well. Cocky, well-dressed, taking their time. I noticed that when the Britons passed them they took their caps off and bobbed their heads, like something out of the feudal era.

I watched for as long as I could stand it, then opened the paper. I was planning to read the rest of the story about the moonbase but when I unfolded it another headline at the bottom caught my eye: CONGRESS PLANS INQUIRY INTO POP MUSIC.

It seemed that Howell Wesley, a senator from Georgia, was pushing for an investigation into what he called "National Socialist influence in the pop music business" and had scheduled a hearing for next month. No wonder the office boys had been so eager to cooperate with Sam.

I read through it quickly, skimming over what I already knew: The Cabal appearing on Sullivan in what looked like SS outfits, that song "Hey Fuhrer" on the Airplane's last album, the punks who'd started singing the Horst Wessel song at that Mothers concert. A couple of items were new to me: a Frisco band called the Reich, and another outfit, the Blitz Kids, who'd released an album with a swastika on the cover. There was a picture of it on the inside page, right next to one showing some kids wearing brownshirt gear. Crawford would be disappointed.

In the last paragraph I found what I was afraid of: "Currently there is one rock group, Roadhouse, touring Nazi Europe as part of a cultural exchange program sponsored by the State Department and the Reich Ministry of Culture. Whether Senator Wesley will wish to question members of the band is unknown at this time."

I dropped the paper in my lap. I could just remember McCarthy's Bund hearings back in the '50s, all those sillyass small businessmen, shopowners, and restauranteurs that he'd dragged down to Washington

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to explain their connection with the Silver Shirts and the other crank outfits. Those people had been put through the wringer. Bankruptcies, broken families, and more than a few suicides, as I recalled. McCarthy hadn't given a shit; he'd done pretty well off it—made it all the way up to minority whip before he drank himself to death. This guy Wesley was simply following a tried and true pattern.

Somehow I could see who was going to get the short end of this stick. I'd have to get in touch with the lawyers. Couldn't depend on the company; they'd be disassociating themselves from the band so fast you'd hear sonic booms. Of course the phone connections from Europe were lousy. I'd better tell Crawford to . . . no, on second thought, I'd do it myself.

I didn't realize the cab had stopped until the driver turned and grunted at me. We were sitting in front of the theater, strange-looking in daylight. I pulled out some pound notes that Crawford had handed around last night. Flicking through them I noticed the eagle unhatching that bent cross on each of them, right next to old Britannia, and in a spasm of disgust folded the batch and handed it to the driver. It must have been enough; he didn't yell as I got out.

I had no trouble getting into the place—there were evidently few guys with shag haircuts and snakeskin boots walking around town that morning. Inside it was lit up, with workers wearing coveralls marching around doing nothing in particular. I went down the aisle to the stage and saw Shenk guarding a stack of equipment.

"Hey, Steve," he called out. "What you doing here?"

"Thought I'd check to see how they were screwing us today."

"No problem," he said. "The ubermenschen have been most cooperative."

"Glad to hear it," I muttered. A couple of the crew were coming around the corner with a dolly. I noticed Willy was wearing a cutoff sweatshirt with a confederate flag on it. "Nice shirt, Willis," I called out.

He looked down and patted his beergut. "I was lookin' for one with the stars 'n' stripes on it but I didn't bring one."

"That's good enough," I told him.

"Yeah," he said as he pushed an amp onto the dolly. "Fucking' nazzi bastards."

I turned back to Shenk. "Hey," he said. "You know there's a NBS crew gonna do a film on us?"

"I heard," I said.

"I was talking to the guy in charge, Reynolds his name is. Had a look at his equipment. They got a camera that broadcasts directly to the studio. No film at all. I didn't even know that was on the market yet."

"Heavy," I mumbled. It figured the goddamn Company would have state-of-the-art stuff.

Somebody yelled for Shenk and he ran off. I walked to the wing of the stage to take a look over the equipment that was still left. Wasn't much: couple of amps, some speaker cabinets, what appeared to be the board

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from the recording unit. Hoth hadn't let them tear it down last night; some kind of rule about closing the place. But it looked as though they'd get it out in short order, in plenty of time for the train. Nothing stolen, evidently, though I hadn't been very worried about that.

I reached the curtains and came to a halt. The OCI guy, Reynolds, was standing at the other side. He was wearing his safari jacket, draped now with electronic gear, and a pair of aviator shades, making him look more like an intelligence goon than ever. Smiling, he walked over.

"I suppose you feel pretty happy about the moonbase," I said when he got close.

"Not particularly," he said. "They're not hardcore up there. Just a bunch of flyboys in trouble."

I grunted at him.

"Doing a little background filming," he said, still smiling.

"I hear you got a jim-dandy camera you're using."

"Yeah. Japanese job. Not for general sale yet. You might say we're giving it field trials."

"Must be nice not to have any film to worry about."

His smile broadened. "Comes in handy."

I couldn't help but smile back. "I'll bet it does."

"Yup. The Boche don't have anything like it. Hard to believe that Germany used to be number one in electronics. They fell way behind when they suppressed computer research after the war. You oughta see 'em trying to get a close look at it."

I realized that he was trying to charm me and tightened up. Nodding, I turned back to the stage and saw another guy, obviously one of Reynold's crew, with what must have been the magic camera slung over his shoulder.

"You wouldn't want to do an interview now?" Reynolds said behind me.

I turned back to him. "Not right away, Reynolds."

"Frank," he said.

"Not right away, Frank," I said, keeping my voice flat.

"Later, then," he said. I nodded without saying anything and brushed past the guy with the camera.

"Mosley did one this morning," Reynolds called out as I went down the ramp. I looked back to see him leaning against a speaker cabinet, grin still plastered across his face. I paused; I'd been hoping Mos had stopped by there—but I was damned if I was going to ask Reynolds anything. I smiled back and kept going.

I didn't see Mos until I got to the station. He was aboard the train, one of those types with narrow corridors and closed compartments—I was becoming convinced that the Nazis had frozen about everything you cared to name the way it had been in 1925. He was in a compartment, talking to a woman, a reporter from the *Berliner Zeitung*. I slipped in and sat on the opposite bench.

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Mos could be pretty good with reporters when he wanted to. It was just like everything else; it depended on his mood, how the reporter struck him, what the weather was like that day. There'd been one skinny little girl in South Cal that he'd done a complete brainblitz on, strolling into the room wearing just leather pants and shades, flexing his muscles and uttering weird one-liners to her questions—which she asked in a voice that got quieter and quieter as she went on. I'd gone along with it, nodding my head and mumbling agreement whenever he came out with something really freaky. She'd finally cut out when Mos had lit a candle and starting passing his hand over it while intoning the lyrics to "Into the Night." On the other hand, there'd been an old guy from an east coast intellectual mag who'd come to sneer but left saying, "Mr. Mosley, speaking with you has been an education in itself. I truly mean that."

It always seemed to work, whichever way he did it.

Today he was on his best behavior. He was teasing her, and she was giggling, her gloved hand up against her lips. Probably thought she was being pretty daring, alone in a train compartment with a depraved American rocker.

They didn't pay much attention to me; the woman turned and nodded as I came in, and Mos not even that. I sat there, fiddling with the paper until they finished and the woman rose to leave. Mos got up to see her out of the compartment. Unusual, that.

I waited until he sat back down and tossed the paper at him. It hit him on the chest and slid to the seat. Mos glanced at it as if he didn't have the vaguest idea of what it was for, then looked up at me.

"Read it," I said. "Bottom of the front page."

I sat there chewing on a nail, studying the opposite bench. The train gave a lurch and I glanced out at the corridor, thinking that I hadn't checked to make sure everybody was aboard. Well, if they'd missed it, fuck 'em. They could catch up on their own. I heard Mos snicker and turned back. He'd opened the paper and had probably seen the picture of the record cover. I eyed him for a minute but that was his only reaction. Finished, he threw it down and looked over at me. "So?"

"Whaddaya mean 'so'? Can't you see we're headed for deep shit?"

His lips twitched as he turned to the window. Pushing myself over on the bench, I leaned toward him. "No, you don't, Mos. Don't you try to smirk me away. That shit might work on Crawford but not on me. You're gonna listen, my friend." I grabbed the paper and shook it. "You think this is some kind of joke?"

He said nothing, just stared out the window at the old tenements lining the tracks. "Congress," he said finally. "You're scared of Congress. That pack of drunks. Some backwoodsman grabs for publicity and you . . ." He turned to me, still smiling. "You start running in circles, just like he wants you to."

I sat there looking back at him, then went into the whole riff: McCarthy, the Witchhunt, the whole country looking for Nazis under the bed. . . . I was well aware that he'd got me, that I was doing the exact

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wrong thing, the worst possible thing, to get any kind of reaction out of him. He'd done it again, as he had a thousand times before: put me in a position where I was swinging my arms wildly, making no connection at all, while he sat there a thousand miles away. It had always been that way, since we'd been kids, Mos two years ahead of me in school, the tall skinny kid with the bangs, always wearing shades as if defying anybody to tell him to take them off. I remembered the first time I'd played with him, me fifteen, proud owner of a Harmony jazz guitar with the strings an inch and a half from the frets, exultant at being asked to a practice session with the school bad boy. After we'd finished—a quick run-through of "Summertime Blues," "All Shook Up," "Louie Louie," and "Barbara Ann" (yeah, Jake Mosley used to be into the Beach Boys), he'd patted me on the head in front of everybody and said, "You'll do." It felt so good that it took me an hour to figure out that I ought to be mad at him for making me look stupid.

After a few minutes I ran down, lamely ending with the idea that we ought to call the lawyers. I looked up at him glumly, newspaper crumpled in my hands.

"Yeah," Mos said. He'd turned his head to look out the window again. We were in the country now, passing fields that looked green but hard-scrabble, like the Pennsylvania hills we'd been raised in. "That's a good idea." He fell silent for a moment, then went on. "You know, I think they've got to you. The Nazis, I mean."

I started to protest. He turned to me, eyes hooded. "No, let me finish. I ain't saying you're scared of them. I'm saying that you're a bit freaked by being here, in Nazi Europe, the captive nations, Festung Europa. You've heard it your whole life, Steve, how bad it is here, what pigs the Nazis are, the Gestapo, all that. It's been pounded into you, and now here you are—and you're a little off balance."

He was quiet for a moment, but I knew he hadn't finished. "I was out there this morning. Walked around town, talked to the locals. It's bad, yeah. They're a little beat down, things are hard." He shrugged. "But not as bad as they could be."

"Aw, Mos, come off it. . . ."

"No? I could tell you a few things about China, Stevie. And what about the US? Everything's great there, right? I bet King would agree to that, if you dug him up. Or the rest of the blacks." He gestured at the paper. "And this investigation you're all freaked out over. Democracy in action." He turned back to the window. "It's not our business, Steve. We're a band and our job is to play. Let the OCI take care of the rest. That's what they get paid for. For us, it's another tour." He turned, his eyes pinning me. "Just like anywhere else."

I sat staring at him. It was hard to tell how serious he was, how much of it he meant and how much was intended to shock. I knew Mos was bitter about the US, had been ever since China. Something had gone out of him there, killed by what he'd seen during the war. He'd been colder when he'd come back, not the same wiseass kid I'd known in school. I

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didn't know what it was—he didn't talk much about the war—but I got the impression that it was the whole grind: a year out there in the cold mountains on the border, fighting over and over for the same piece of ground alongside Chinese troops that couldn't be depended on, watching your buddies die around you. . . .

While I'd been safe at school on a student deferment. The old guilt came welling up, as always.

All the same, there was something he wasn't telling me. I could see that, much as he was trying to hide it: he was a little more irritable than usual, his accustomed cool frayed at the edges.

I leaned back, enjoying the rare feeling of having a stick to poke Jake Mosley with. As I was trying to figure out a way to use it the door slid open. A woman stood there, arms braced against the sides. She was blond, hair in rolls over her forehead the way they wore it here, tall, with a hell of a body on her. She was wearing a black dress that came below her knees.

She looked at the two of us. "I'm sorry," she said in a voice that had the girlish edge that I knew Mos liked. "I thought you were alone."

Mos raised his hand. "Lily," he said. "Come on in."

She stepped into the compartment, smiling down at me. "Steve—Lily ten Boom." I took her hand and shook it, trying not to laugh as I thought of what Gooch would do with a name like that.

As she sat next to Mos I decided I might as well cut out. "Later," I said as I got up.

"Steve," Mos called out as I pushed the door open. I turned back. "Keep cool, man," he said. "It's not as bad as you think. Europe's old—it'll outlast the Nazis. In the meantime, try to enjoy what it's got to offer." He gave me a broad smile, the same kind he'd given me that first time we played together. I winked at him and closed the door.

I found everybody else in the car, smoking, drinking, bullshitting. I sat down, tossed the paper on the table and looked at it, deciding it was best to keep quiet about the hearing. Gooch was sitting at the next table, nursing a beer. "Where'd Mos come up with that blond he's with?" I called out.

Gooch gaped at me. "What blond?" he said; lot of help, as always.

"Never mind," I told him, leaning back against the headrest.

When we got to Liverpool I was so beat I headed straight for the hotel without talking to anybody.

The date went well, right up until the end of the show. There weren't near as many official types as there had been in London; in fact, half the front seats were empty until I talked Hoth into letting some of the kids in back take them. He gave me an argument, acting as if we'd never discussed it, but finally threw in the towel.

I watched them from the wing as they walked up the aisles. They were quiet, almost hesitant, as if they were being offered something they

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knew could be snatched away. But there was a sense of expectation as well—they'd waited a long time for what they were going to see.

Something stirred in me as I caught that feeling. You're wrong, Mos, I told myself. You're dead wrong: this is more than just another tour. I looked for him. He was standing to the rear, talking to the blond.

There was a muttering in the front rows, and I smiled as I saw the Party members swiveling around to watch the kids sit down among them. I turned to Andy, who was fooling with the knobs on his Fender. "It's gonna be a good show."

He made a face at me. "Better than fucking London, anyway."

And it was good. Not good the way it is in the States, not that wild, careless exhilaration you get when a band is firing on all six and the crowd is running right with you, but good all the same. The kids wanted us there, that was clear from the first chord. There was a hush as we ran out on stage—there'd been no comic or anything else, I'd made sure of that. We kept the lights down, as usual, until I hit the opening riff on "Unsatisfied" and they lit up, first on me, back by the amps, then on Mos standing in front of the mike, feet wide and head down.

I kept the riff going alone, no bass or drums, over and over until it was nearly unbearable, then nodded to Gooch, who slammed everything in sight as the stage lights went up. I ran to the front and Mos started singing.

Simple, but it always works. It worked there. At first the kids were quiet, as if they didn't know how to respond, or were afraid of letting go—I saw some of them turning to look toward the back. But by the third number they started to loosen up, whistling, clapping, a few yells here and there. Nothing like what you get in the States, but somehow it seemed to mean more.

I paid no attention to the officials. We weren't playing for them.

It took Andy and Gooch awhile to get in the groove—they ran through the first couple of numbers as if they'd been boozing it up until dawn. But I egged them both on, playing a little ahead of the beat to make them catch up, and they both started cranking the way they knew how.

Ray was Ray, putting in the keyboard fills where they were needed, never getting too fancy. He had a new instrument that he was in love with, a real-time synthesizer, and I'd let him work it into a few arrangements even though I didn't particularly care for the sound.

But Mos was on fire. I hadn't expected it from him, but there he was, throwing himself into it as I hadn't seen in years. Tossing the mike above his head, swinging it out over the first rows, leaping in that way he had, where he seemed to float back down to the stage. No patter, Mos had never been one for any of that crap, but it didn't matter here any more than it did back home: he was still the best manipulator of an audience that I'd ever seen.

We paced the show carefully, something I'd always considered crucial: a few fast numbers, a couple of ballads, and a slow blues, then the buildup to the end, broken once by another slow tune before the final breakout.

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The kids kept up with us, silent in the slow numbers, clapping along with the faster ones, even singing the choruses on the hits—I wondered where they'd managed to get ahold of them. By the time we were halfway through I figured it for a damn good show, maybe a great one. I even threw my bottleneck out into the crowd after the solo in "Goodbye, Manhattan," which I only do when things have gone really well.

I wasn't even bothered by seeing Reynolds and his crew running around the apron with their fancy cameras.

It was during the encore—the fifties medley, "Carol," "Little Sister," and "Whole Lotta Shakin' "—that there was some kind of disturbance in back. Somebody came in through the doors and started yelling. I couldn't quite make out what it was through the lights and figured it was the goddamn guards up to something, which made me feel a little sour, but it quieted down and I forgot about it as I spit out those Berry riffs as fast and hard as I could. Then it was over, the lights went up, and the crowd began to leave—but not all of them.

It was the Party hacks who were walking up the aisles. The others—the kids, our audience—were standing in their seats, clapping quietly but firmly. I watched them, smiling like a maniac, and decided to give them something else—it'd be a long time before they had any more of what we'd brought them. But when I hit the strings I heard nothing, and turning to the wing I saw Hoth staring at me sternly and gesturing me offstage with a prissy flap of his hand. I looked back at Andy and Gooch. They hadn't moved, they had the same idea, but it was no good: no power, no music. Yanking out the cord, I turned back to the audience. Mos was walking across stage waving to them, but they seemed to want something more. I took a few steps and halted at the edge of the stage. I looked out at them again, those poor kids with so much taken from them, the very earth stolen from under their feet. Then I flashed them the vee.

They went wild—whistling, stamping, cheering. I stood there for a moment, fingers raised, then turned and followed the band offstage.

It was called the peace sign back home, but they knew what it really meant.

I expected Hoth to say something, but he just gave me a cold glare as I went past.

I looked for Mos, but he wasn't around. Gone off with Lily, I guessed. Well, maybe she was good for him, if tonight was any indication. Andy and Gooch came stumbling out of the dressing room, followed by Ray. Gooch stuck his thumb out at me. "Good fuckin' show, man."

"Outta sight," Andy said.

"Yeah," Ray said. "It was like the first couple times I saw you guys."

"Whattaya mean, 'you guys'?" I said.

He smiled back. "Us guys," he said quietly.

Andy pushed past me, slinging on his jacket, followed by Gooch. "Git some beer," Gooch growled.

"Right," I said to them. "See you back at the hotel."

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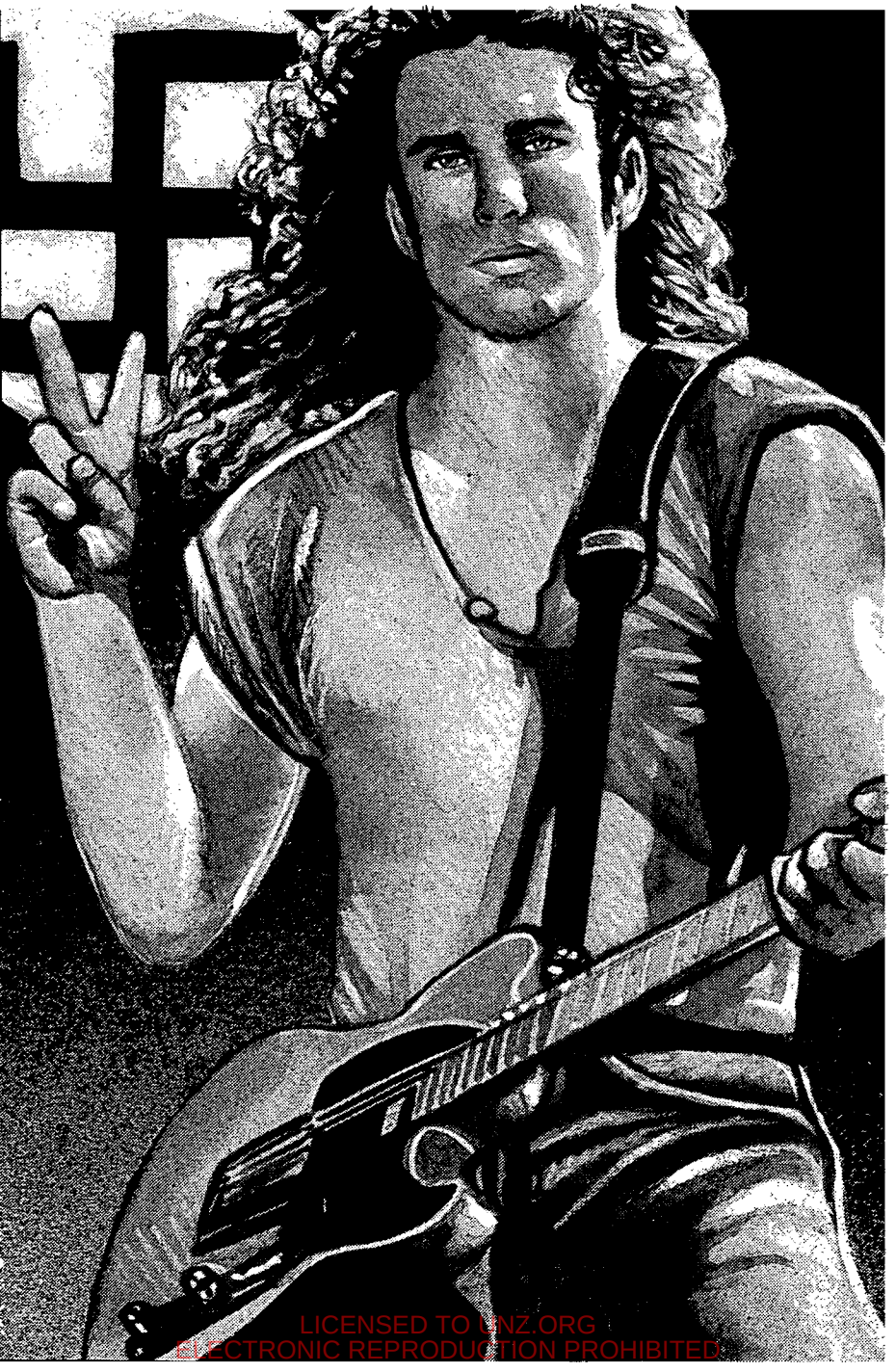

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I walked to the dressing room, put the Gibson in its case and then went to pick up the Strat where I'd left it onstage. Shenk and the crew were already at work; it seemed that this place didn't have any special closing hour. I looked out at the room, empty now and dark, though there seemed to be echoes still sounding from the dim walls.

"Damn good show," I heard behind me. I turned to see Shenk pulling up the swaths of duct tape that held the equipment cables to the floor. "You guys might just get someplace."

I laughed and stepped over to him. He had a wad of the tape in one hand and was adding to it steadily. "Duct tape," he said. "The real secret of the industry. Get rid of this stuff and there'd be no rock and roll."

He lifted another patch of it, then paused and gave me a questioning look. "What the hell went on during the last number?"

"You mean out in back? I don't know. The Gestapo chasing some music lovers, I suppose."

"Thought so," he said, then squatted down to pick at another length of the stuff. "I don't like the looks of that blond."

"The fraulein?"

"I heard she was Dutch."

I gave a snort. "My ass."

Across the stage Willy and the rest of the heathens were tearing down the equipment, grunting and mumbling to each other as they pushed the Marshalls out of the way. "I think he ought to dump her."

Shenk chuckled to himself. "You gonna tell him that?"

"Actually, I was thinking of asking you."

"Ha, ha, Webb, ha, ha indeed." He finished with the tape and started on the cables, then looked up. "You still around, Webb? Why don't you beat it. Men at work here."

I kicked the wad of tape toward him, then turned and walked offstage, laughing to myself.

I was halfway to the exit when I saw Reynolds, looking as if he was waiting for somebody. "Not bad," he said as I walked up to him. "Even though I'm an Elvis fan myself."

"Uh-huh," I said, wishing he'd find some official secrets to take pictures of. "Somehow I figured that."

He swung the door open for me. All the way down the corridor I'd been hearing something outside, a voice yelling, and now it increased in volume and became clear: shouts in a strident, hectoring tone, damn near flat-out shrieks. I hesitated at the doorway, listening. It was in German. Feeling a sudden chill, I stepped slowly outside.

The door opened onto a side street, and there was nothing in sight there. I turned to where the voice was coming from, on the main drag in front of the theater. There seemed to be a lot of people out there but that wasn't what caught my eye. What I noticed instead was a flickering, dancing light reflecting off the buildings on the other side of the street. "What the hell," I whispered.

"Bonfire," Reynolds said. "They go for that. Kinda like Boy Scouts."

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He'd come up beside me and was standing with his hands in his jacket pockets. "Jugend," he said. "Having a little rally against American decadence. They were the ones who broke in during the last part of the show. Thought you knew."

I shook my head, then glanced around me. The street was empty, no cars, no one on foot. My punishment for making the Churchill sign: now I got to walk back to the hotel.

"Be interesting to check 'em out, see what they're up to," Reynolds said. "They may even be feeding some of your records to the fire, which is something you won't see otherwise. But . . ." he paused. "That wouldn't be too smart."

He stepped into the street and raised his hand. A block down a pair of headlights came on and a car pulled out. It stopped in front of Reynolds. Opening the door, he gestured toward my guitars. "Better slide them in first," he said.

I got in behind him, resting one foot on the cases. As we started up I leaned forward to see what I could of the Jugend, but the driver made a U-turn and headed back the way he'd come.

I sat quietly for a block or so before turning to Reynolds. He was looking out the window at nothing in particular. "We figure they're going to build it up bit by bit until they get a real fervor going," he said, not turning in my direction. "This is only the start—they weren't meant to actually bust up the show this early. That was supposed to get them frustrated. Same way you train a Doberman—get him all riled up then hold him back."

"You mean to tell me they're going to be following us with this mob?"

"Sure," Reynolds said, looking over at me with an expression of surprise. "They've got it all worked out. It's a science to them."

"Is it really?"

"Oh, yeah. Of course, what's going on outside isn't helping much either. They're having fits about what the Air Force is up to. . . ."

I looked at him as if he was nuts. "What?"

"You didn't hear? They launched a lander from Vandenberg this morning. It's up there now, rendevoused with Goddard Station."

"A lunar lander."

He nodded, grinning as if he'd built the thing himself.

"I suppose they just had it lying around."

"Sure," he laughed. "Never know when one will come in handy. No. . . . I imagine they were going to break the interdiction sometime in the next couple months, land on the farside then announce it once they'd gotten established. You know RFK doesn't particularly care for the bastards sitting up there without anybody to keep an eye on them."

I sat back and thought about it. Americans weren't going to be very popular in the Reich no matter what happened, and if the Jugend already had us set up . . .

I turned to Reynolds. "Look," I said, the words nearly sticking in my throat. "I don't know how to handle this."

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Reynolds waved a hand at me. "You got two choices. You can cancel, which means taking your loss, which I don't think you want to do. Or you can keep on plugging and see what comes up. Things aren't set in concrete—they could change their whole tune tomorrow. I've seen it happen."

The car slowed and I saw that we were pulling up in front of the hotel. Reynolds turned and looked at me, eyebrows raised. I stared back for a moment, then said, "Be a shame to pay that penalty clause."

"Good man," Reynolds said. I turned to open the door and he got out behind me, lifting the guitar cases and handing them to me. "I'd kinda like to see how far they intend to go anyway," he said as he got back in. "It's a unique situation."

He must have seen the look on my face. Leaning back out, he said, "Don't worry about it. You'll know damn well when to pull out. To get at you they'll have to go through us first." He winked and closed the door.

The car drove off. I picked up the cases and walked into the hotel.

Nobody said anything to me when I got to the suite. The rest of the band must have missed seeing the mob in front of the theater—maybe they hadn't had the fire lit yet. I decided not to mention it myself until I got a chance to talk to Mos.

But I didn't see Mos that night, or the next morning, either.

They got us up and out early—early for us, anyway, around ten. The next date was at Edinburgh that night, at a new cultural center, a Speer-nightmare of a building put up only the last year. Tight schedule, yeah, but we were in tour mode and it didn't bother us.

At the station the guys were hung over and grumpy. Crawford was the only one bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, traipsing around in his velvet jacket jabbering about how great things were going. "You seen Mos around?" I asked him.

He shook his head, then brightened. "Hey, you know there was a big English Nazi named Mosley?"

"Yeah. They shot him."

Plunkett, obsequious as ever, was hovering over the baggage like a bum looking for a tip. The whistle blew and I headed for the train, vaguely thinking that Mos was already aboard with his Boche dumpling.

The crew had already left so I didn't have to worry about them. I stashed my axes—for some reason I wasn't letting them out of my sight—then went poking into the compartments.

They were all empty. I stood at the exit door for a minute, then walked back down the corridor. Had he been in the lounge car?

I'd nearly reached it when Hoth loomed up at the end of the corridor. He stiffened as I approached. I hesitated, unwilling to speak, but finally said, "Have you seen Mosley?"

A harsh smile crossed his face. "I thought you were informed," he said. "Mr. Mosley has chosen to travel by car."

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The smile reappeared as he pushed past me. I stood there for a moment, stupid as sin, then turned to go after him. The door to the other car was just closing.

Halfway there it opened again and Plunkett emerged, holding what looked like a cooler. "Where's Hoth going?" I said to him.

"Herr Hoth?" Plunkett looked at me in surprise. "I haven't laid eyes on him, sir."

That didn't deserve a reply. I edged around him while he helpfully turned to put the cooler or whatever it was right in my path. We struggled for a minute until he swung around completely, cooler held in front of him. "Beer for the boys, sir," he said, nodding down at it proudly. "They do like their beer."

"Yeah," I said and went through the door.

The next car was a coach, full of everything but Hoth. A few men in uniform, bureaucrats, some shabby Britons. I turned to go back. No use chasing him from car to car like an Inspector Rodriguez movie.

In the lounge I found Plunkett waving a beer at Gooch like a bone at a mastiff. Gooch gestured him away with a look of suffering. "No, man," he was saying. "I want one I'll grab one, okay?"

Ordinarily I would have been fascinated by the sight of Gooch refusing a beer, but not today. I went to a bench and sat down.

Plunkett had wandered over to force a beer on Andy, who took it with ill grace and put it on the table. As Plunkett started toward the door I called out to him.

"Sir?" he said, smiling down at me.

"What's this about Mosley deciding to drive?"

"Yes, sir," he said, smile broadening as if it had been his idea. "Early this morning. With the young lady." His smile took on a roguish air: men among men.

"Right," I told him. "Thanks much."

I sank back. Hard to know what to think. It was in character for Mos, that was true. He liked nothing better than to go zooing off at odd moments, popping up at the last minute as if he'd merely been around the corner for smokes—part of the great Mosley Mystique. But still. . . . I'd have thought he'd have a lot more sense than to pull it over here, even with his conviction that the Reich was no worse than, say, Alabama. I didn't like it, particularly after that business last night. It was too much—first that stupid, sentimental move of mine, then the Jugend howling for American blood, and now this. . . .

I thought then of Reynolds, and realized for the first time that I didn't know how he or his people were getting around. Could they be on the train? Doubtful. D'Alessio, now—he was probably at the consulate in Edinburgh, and there was no way I could get ahold of him either. I damned them all mentally for not setting up something, some method of contacting them, but then thought back on how I'd acted. I probably wouldn't have bothered myself.

I felt somebody sit down and raised my head to see Gooch, a hangdog

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expression on his face. He gazed at me for a second, then shook his head. "Man, these nazzis are starting to bug me. . . ."

"For chrissake, Gooch, this just occur to you?" I said, regretting the words as I spoke them.

He gave me a hurt look and started to get up. I raised my hand. "Sorry, man. What the hell are they doing now?"

He smiled, all forgiven, and sat back down. "Well, that goddamn Mick, for one thing. Always coming up to us with brew. Like they're trying to keep us drunk all the time."

"Probably are," I muttered. Gooch went on, a lot of small things, but enough to tell me that I hadn't been paying enough attention to the band. After a few minutes he ran down. "I know it don't sound like much, but . . ."

"No, you're right. These people are mindfuckers." I went over it in detail, everything that had happened the last two days, ending with the Jugend rally last night.

Gooch was staring at me in shock. "What they do that for?"

"Cause they hate our guts."

Gooch laughed uneasily. "Why, man?"

"They've been told to."

Frowning, Gooch looked away. Bless your simple country soul, I said to myself. He simply couldn't believe it. That anybody could be trained to hate at a phrase, at a word, at a finger pointed at a target. It occurred to me then that there were a lot of Gooches back home.

He peered up at me. "So this is all deliberate, huh?"

"Looks like it."

He thought it over for a moment, then got up. "Keep that in mind," he said. He shook his head. "God, I can't wait 'til we're back in the States."

"You and me both, Gooch."

He started to turn away but paused. "Uhh . . . Steve? We ain't really gonna have a nazzi sign on the next album, are we?"

"Over my dead body."

"Good," he said, then moved away.

They stopped the train a few minutes later, at the border, keeping up the fiction about the "Kingdom of Scotland." A bunch of border cops came aboard to check papers. They were all wearing kilts. And, of course, the armband.

We pulled in at five and I went nuts looking for Mos for the next three hours. He wasn't at the hotel and Shenk hadn't seen him at the hall either. I phoned the consulate, but no calls were getting through for some mysterious reason. After the fifth try I decided to go over there myself, but by then it was seven, an hour before showtime. I told the rest of the band to head on over, then waited until half past myself.

He pulled in at five minutes to eight, dressed for the stage, a smirk on his face. At that moment I wanted to kill him more than I'd wanted

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anything before in my life. He walked past me, the girl in tow, giving me a nod. I turned away before I lashed out at him.

Behind him I saw Reynolds, looking beat. I went up to him, guitar slung over my shoulder. "Look, man," I said to him. "We've got to set up some way to keep in touch."

Reynolds studied me for a moment. "Good idea," he said finally.

I gestured over my shoulder with my chin. "You know that silly bastard drove up here today?"

He gave me a disgusted look. "Where the hell you think I've been?"

The sound system erupted just then with a thick Scottish burr announcing the band. I turned to see everybody headed onstage. With a glance back at Reynolds, I followed them.

The show went pretty well, even though I was preoccupied enough to flub a couple of riffs, not usually a problem for me. I was keeping my eyes on the back, trying to see if anyone was coming in. If the guys noticed I wasn't playing up to par they didn't let it bother them. They kept it tight all the way through.

It was the same setup as Liverpool; they'd allowed the audience to take any empty seats. I wasn't paying much attention, but we did get plenty of applause. The kids seemed to enjoy it. I hope they did.

Reynolds came up as I went offstage before the encore. He grabbed me by the arm. "Make this as quick as you can," he said. "I just got word that a couple hundred Jugend are pulling up in trucks."

I nodded, picturing the front of the place. A big square with a statue of Hitler in the center. Plenty of room for kicking ass, if that's what they wanted. "I should warn those kids . . ." I said.

Reynolds squeezed my arm tighter. "Don't."

I pulled away and headed back out. The audience started yelling but I ignored them. I went up to Gooch and Andy and told them what to do, then Ray and Mos. He looked at me with no expression, then shrugged and turned to the mike.

We went through "Carol" at a fast clip and headed offstage. Reynolds' bunch were waiting; they hurried us out and into the cars as if they'd rehearsed it. I looked around for Shenk and the crew but they were nowhere in sight; I guessed they'd already left.

As the car started I opened the window and stuck my head out. From the square in front I could hear shouting; it faded as we drove off. I don't know if there were any screams.

When we reached the hotel the cops were waiting, some of them in kilts and others in brown German uniforms. They ran us inside as fast as we left the cars. No talk, no questions, just straight onto the elevator and up to our floor. I put my guitars down and threw on a clean shirt. In the bathroom I tossed some water on my face, trying to ignore my expression in the mirror.

I'd figured Mos wouldn't be in the suite, and he wasn't. In fact, aside from Ray and Gooch nobody else was around. They both got up as I came out. "What the hell's going on?" Ray said, his voice high.

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"Later," I told him. "Which one is Mos's room?"

"Down the hall," Gooch said. I nodded and went to the door, opened it and found something I hadn't counted on.

There was a guard outside, a stocky, round-faced mutt dressed in a brown uniform. As I tried to walk past he stepped across the doorway to block me.

"I'm only going down the hall," I said, enunciating the words as if that'd help him understand them.

"Nein," he said, swinging up his arm at me—a quick gesture, as if he were used to being obeyed. I took a step forward and he moved in, nearly shoving me with his beergut. "Innenseite," he said, pointing into the room so that I'd make no mistake. "Schnell."

From down the hall came another voice and the sound of footsteps. I looked over to see another guard, this one in a fancier outfit, walking toward us. I gave up and shut the door.

Gooch and Ray were staring at me. I recognized the look: it was called "How you gonna get us out of this one, Steve?" Well, this wasn't a ripoff promoter in Mobile or a plane connection gone wrong, but I'd get 'em out of it, all right. I poured a drink and then explained it to them—everything I'd already told Gooch, plus what I thought had happened after the concert. About halfway through Crawford appeared. I waited for him to make just one remark downplaying things but he said nothing.

I expected questions after I finished but there were none. I looked between them a few seconds, then added, "I'll tell you one thing: this is ended. We're outta here tomorrow."

I glanced at Crawford, sure that he'd have something to say to that, but he was silent, staring at the rug.

I went to the phone to try the consulate, but apparently the strike was still on. After awhile they all got up and left. I refilled my glass and sat down to wait out the night alone.

At about three in the morning I went to bed myself. It was Crawford who woke me four hours later. I was going to get up early anyway, but it was just as well that he came in, with the news he had.

He walked in without knocking and called my name. I started up on the bed, out of what dreams I'll never know. He had a cold, closed look on his face, and I blinked at him in puzzlement until I realized that he was in shock. Mos, I thought; it had to be Mos.

Sliding off the bed I grabbed a shirt and put it on—I'd slept in my pants, so I didn't have to bother with them.

"Steve," Crawford said once more—he'd been repeating it since he came in. I turned to him, stuffing the shirt into my pants. "What is it," I said, my voice hoarse.

I hadn't noticed the paper he had in his hand. He held it out to me, the pages crackling as they shook. "They shot eight kids. Last night . . . eight kids, Steve."

I stared at him, feeling a sudden flash of pity, realizing that I didn't

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know him at all. All of his bullshit—the heartiness, the hypocrisy, the idiot jokes—they were nothing more than a shield for a very frightened man. And that was at home; what he was going through over here didn't bear thinking about.

I stepped over and took the paper. It was a London *Times*. At the top was a wild headline about American defiance of Reich sovereignty with a photo of an Air Force spacecraft beneath it. I ignored that and looked over the rest of the page.

It was down at the bottom, in the righthand corner. The headline read HOOLIGANS RIOT AT RACE MUSIC PROGRAM. The story was the pack of lies I'd expected: the audience had poured out of the hall attacking everybody in sight, to be subdued by the heroic efforts of Scottish cops with the willing help of the Staatspolizei. The toll was eight dead, twenty-four injured.

They didn't come down on us too hard; the story only mentioned that we'd been playing.

"How could they do that?" Crawford whispered. "I didn't know it was like this over here."

I studied him for a minute. He was rocking himself on the bed, hands clamped between his thighs.

Of course he didn't know; all he knew was the romance of it: the swastika, red and black, so much more forceful than any of our symbols, the cool-looking uniforms, the blond, blue-eyed master race in all the pictures, the empire that ruled a third of the world. Nobody knew any more than that.

Nobody wanted to know. Not even me.

I folded up the paper. "Well, Richie," I said softly. "It is like that."

He got up to follow as I walked to the door. I had to find Mos, put an end to this, get us all out of here. . . .

I halted just outside. Mos was sitting at a small table in the center of the room, calmly eating breakfast. Looking over at me, he picked up his coffee cup and nodded. "Morning," he said.

I walked to the table and leaned over it. "You hear about the shootings?"

He nodded, cutting himself a bite of Eggs Benedict.

I stifled an impulse to ask him whether he still thought the Reich was just like the US. "We're outta here, man."

"No argument from me," he said, lifting up the coffeepot to fill an empty cup. He pushed it toward me and gestured to the empty seat across from him. I ignored him. "You seen Hoth anywhere?"

"Nope," he said, shaking his head. "He'll be around, though. He's got a way of popping up."

He started eating again. I pulled out the chair and sat down across from him. "Mos," I said. He glanced up at me, then back down at his plate. "Mos," I said, irritation flashing through me, "Square biz."

He laid the knife and fork on the plate and gazed at me, eyebrows

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raised, as if distracted by some half-witted behavior that might prove mildly entertaining.

"Mos, that Lily . . . she ain't Dutch."

He sighed and grabbed a napkin to wipe his hands. I leaned further across the table. "No, man, hear me out. . . ."

"Steve," he said, "What the hell do you take me for?"

I stared at him in silence. "This chick shows up," he went on, "In the middle of occupied London. She's well-dressed, hasn't missed a lot of meals. She's blond, she's tall, she's just what I go for—and I'm supposed to think she strolled in off the street." He picked up his fork. "For chrissake, don't be as dumb as these clowns here."

He speared the last piece of egg and took a sip of coffee to wash it down. Pushing the plate away, he leaned back in the seat. "Anyway," he said, "I dumped her."

I blinked at him; nothing to say, nothing at all. He waved at the cup in front of me. "Drink your coffee, Stevie."

At that moment the door opened. I raised my head, not knowing what to expect. A guard was holding it wide, a different one from last night, a Scotsman in a kilt. I was rising from the chair when D'Alessio walked in, followed by the same nameless assistant who'd been with him in London.

D'Alessio gave me a look as he swept into the room. "I know," I said to him, "You couldn't get . . ."

I fell silent as Hoth appeared. He was carrying a briefcase and eyeing me with an expression of smug certainty.

D'Alessio halted and turned to him. "I'd like a few minutes alone to discuss things with these people," he said.

Tugging his pants at the knees, Hoth sat down on a couch. "I see nothing to warrant that," he said as he opened the case. D'Alessio scowled at him, then turned and took my arm.

He led me to the other corner of the room and leaned close. "You're not planning on finishing this tour?"

I shook my head. "No way."

"Good." He was about to go on when Hoth cleared his throat and said loudly, "To begin . . ."

We turned to face him. "I must inform you that the governments of France and Belgium have canceled your engagements due to the disturbance last night." He threw two envelopes on the couch. "Those are your official notifications. Your fees, of course, will be paid regardless."

I grimaced at the way he said "governments." "Well, that's good news." I stepped toward him with my arms crossed. "All we have to do now is cancel Amsterdam."

Hoth's smirk didn't diminish one iota. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Webb?"

"I said we're pulling out. No more shows. We didn't come here to see our audience mowed down in the fucking streets."

"You intend to abrogate a legally binding contract?"

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"That's right. We'll pay the penalty. No problem with that. The checks from the other two shows will about cover it."

Hoth nodded to himself. "Very well." He shut his briefcase and stood up. "In that case it's a good thing we've placed guards here."

I dropped my arms. "What?"

"From here on, you can consider yourselves in custody. This breach of contract will have to be adjudicated in a Reich court."

I looked over at D'Alessio. He had his head down, a crazed smile on his face.

"Goddammit," I yelled at Hoth, "that contract was signed according to the laws of New York. . . ."

"This is not New York, Webb. You don't expect us to trust a contract drawn up by some Jew lawyer, do you?"

I leapt toward him, closing the distance until I was right in his face. He didn't make a move, didn't even flinch. "What the fuck do you mean?" I shouted. "You want another massacre? A bigger one this time? You had those Jugend punks waiting outside for 'em. You made that happen. You expect us to go along with that?"

He looked back at me, only inches away, smirk intact, his eyes cold. "There is no way you could know that, Webb . . . unless of course your film crew friends told you. In any case, it's irrelevant." He nodded to the rest of them. "If you'll excuse me. . . ."

He was turning toward the door when Mos spoke. "One sec . . ." I looked back at him. He was still sitting at the table, coffee cup in hand.

Hoth halted, looking back with an expression of mild interest. Mos gave him a friendly nod. "We'll do your show for you," he said. "If it's that important."

Mos glanced toward me. "It's not the first time we've been screwed like this, Steve. We'll just take it slow, have a little fun with it."

I nodded, too angry to speak, leaving it in his hands.

Mos smiled back up at Hoth. "And we hate to break a contract."

"Excellent, Mr. Mosley," Hoth said, suddenly jovial. "The Ministry will be quite pleased." He paused for a moment. "And in any case, your equipment and crew were sent out this morning."

He inclined his head and left. I turned back to the room. Crawford, who'd been watching the whole thing, gave me a sick look and went into his room.

For the next five minutes I paced back and forth, damning Hoth, the Jugend, the whole goddamn Reich. D'Alessio sat down across from Mos, explaining that there wasn't much they could do. I didn't bother to listen. I knew that.

I stopped and stared out the window, not registering the view. Behind me I heard the two of them running down, D'Alessio telling Mos that there'd be a diplomatic protest note sent to Berlin, but that it was worthless, so much wastepaper. No shit, I muttered, and went over to the table.

"See if you can get Crawford out of here," I said as I propped myself on the edge. "He's useless as he is, and there's no reason he should stay."

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D'Alessio nodded. His partner took out a notepad and wrote something down. "I wouldn't worry," D'Alessio said. "They just want to put pressure on us. They closed the art exhibit too. Won't let anybody in—claimed there was a bomb threat."

"It's the kids, man," I said. "That's all that matters."

D'Alessio closed his eyes. "I don't think too many will be there," he said. "It's been broadcast all over the Reich."

I grunted an answer. D'Alessio got up. "I wish I could tell you more, but . . . anyway, you'll be covered. Don't worry about that."

He left, telling us he'd get back to us later. We sat silently for a minute, Mos and I, the only sound the clink of his cup as he set it down.

"She took a fall, Lily did," Mos said finally, as if that was the only subject worthy of conversation. I made a face—another one of his goddamn routines.

"I'm not one to boast, but . . ."

"Sure, Mos," I said.

"She cried when I threw her out this morning."

I looked over at him. He was leaning back, hands behind his head, gazing up at the ceiling. "I never told you much about China, Steve," he said.

"No, you didn't." I frowned at him. It seemed that he was just rambling, but that wasn't Mos. I slid off the table into a chair, picked up the coffeepot and poured myself a cup.

"Not much to tell," Mos went on. "It was during the Stalemate, nothing but a few airstrikes and the occasional bunch of Kirghiz or Cossacks trying a penetration. . . ." He fell silent, as though he were reliving it. "But there was one weird thing. Back in Yining, IV Corps HQ, there was this guy ran a little business—souvenirs, a little black market. He was a Jew, Polish. Skinny guy, burnt-out look about him. Anyway, he had this one story he told everybody. About a place in Poland named Oswiecim—Germans called it Auschwitz. Don't know what it's called now, I tried to look it up once, it's not listed anyplace. Anyway, he was in a camp there. . . ."

"Relocation camp," I said.

"Yeah, but that wasn't it. This guy, Sholem was his name, said it was set up to kill Jews. Period. No relocation, nothing. They were brought there and gassed like dogs. Men, women, children, all of 'em."

"Yeah, but that was . . ." I looked and fell silent.

Mos was staring at me intently. "Propaganda?" he said softly.

I nodded. That's what I'd always heard. There'd been a lot of stories like that back in the '50s, from McCarthy, Nixon, and that crew. And not only them—some intellectuals too, most of them Jewish. I'd always figured it for OCI bullshit myself.

"Yeah." Mos had leaned back again. "But I'll tell you, Stevie, reading it is one thing, but talking to this guy. . . . It may not have happened, but he *believed* it happened."

"How'd he get out if they were killing them all?"

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"They got sloppy the last few months. He slipped out of the camp, ran into some partisans, they went across the lines into Russia right before the big collapse. Anyway, I asked Lily about it last night. . . . I knew she was Gestapo, I got that out of her two days back. . . . She is Dutch, by the way. She freaked. She totally flipped. Told me not to talk about it, that nobody talked about it, that it was in the past. . . . So I told her some of the stories that Sholem told me. Then she changed her tune. Never happened. It was a lie, it was the famine that killed most of them, the rest were still there, in the Ostreich. . . ." His voice trailed off. "That's when I threw her out."

His smile had returned, not the distant one he'd worn a moment ago but colder, harder, more like what appeared on the cover shots. I gazed at him for a few seconds, rubbing my forehead. "Mos," I said. "She's going to tell them what happened. . . ."

He thrust his arms out, stretched. "So what?" Taking in my expression, he laughed, low in his throat. "It's a game, Stevie, nothing more than that. They make a move, then we make one. It goes on until everybody gets tired and goes home."

I couldn't tell whether he was talking about the Cold War in general or just us. "Seems they've got us flush against the goal line at this point."

"Maybe. Whistle hasn't blown yet."

He sat there, elbows on the table, a ghost of a smile on his face. "Okay," I said. "What are you thinking?"

The smile broadened. "The boys know any Dylan?"

We were flown across the North Sea in some kind of vertical take-off plane, a big monster with movable rotors on the ends of the wings. I thought it was going to be noisy as hell but it wasn't that bad.

Nobody was talking much anyway. Crawford had flown home earlier, showing a lot more relief than seemed necessary. No sign of either Hoth or his tame Irishman; just us, alone in the forward compartment.

Mos was sitting in front, wearing shades, either looking out over the water or dozing. The other guys had turned one of the seats around and were playing cards, saying only enough to keep the game moving.

They'd asked me to sit in, but I turned them down. I was feeling too fidgety. After we took off and the seatbelt sign went green I got up and prowled around before opening the door to the rear cabin.

It was half filled, but that wasn't what surprised me: seeing Reynolds and his crew did that. He nodded at me, as if we had an appointment and I was right on time. I let the door close and went over to him.

"Would have come up front myself but I figured it was locked," he said as I sat down next to him.

"I didn't think you were aboard."

"This is a regular scheduled flight. They reserved the cabin for you. You can buy tickets for it. So," he shrugged. "We bought some."

I glanced at the other passengers. A standard crowd, nobody particularly standing out. "Probably want to keep an eye on us all, too."

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"There's that," Reynolds said.

"I'm surprised they let you guys run around like this."

"Nahh, think about it. This way they know who we are. If they threw us out they'd get another batch and have to start all over."

I thought about it—it made sense. "They ever kill anybody?"

"Yeah, once. Back in the '50s." I waited and he went on. "We dusted off every asset they had in Mexico in retaliation. They didn't do it again."

He chuckled at me. "Don't look so worried, kiddo," he said. "We don't know what they've got planned for Amsterdam, but it won't be anything like that." He paused. "You can expect something, though. I heard from Dee. He went over last night. Seems they'll have their own film crew there."

"Outtasight," I muttered.

"Probably a mass rejection of American bourgeois decadence, live and in color. Embarrassing, but nothing more. You guys can handle it. Especially that Mosley." He nodded toward the front. "Take a lot more than that to fluster him."

There was a change in the quality of light from outside. I looked out the window to see that we'd reached the coast. Europe, the Continent. To the east was Berlin, Hitler's tomb, the missile farms, the relocation camps. . . . "You ever hear of a town out in Poland called Os . . ."

"Auschwitz?"

I nodded. "Did they really . . . ?"

"Twelve million," he said. "Another twenty in Russia. Asia . . . nobody knows." His eyes narrowed at my expression. "Believe it," he said quietly.

"Mos heard about it in China," I said a moment later.

"Yeah, a few survivors there." He shook his head. "Mosley had a hard time. That court martial . . ."

"What?"

"He never told you? He got pissed about the Chinese slaughtering prisoners. Faced down one of their officers. Not many ever got away with that. . . . But I'll let him tell you the rest."

"He never talks about it." I looked out at the sunlight flashing off the rotors. "This'd make a damn good blitzkrieg weapon," I muttered.

"What, this thing?"

Reynolds was making a face at me. "Nahh. Knock it out of the sky. One Redeye, and bang." He shook his head. "Knock it out of the sky."

I laughed as I got up. Reynolds waved. "See you on the ground."

Amsterdam was supposed to be the showplace of the New Europe, more cultured than Paris, statelier than the Hague, more monumental than Rome, something they could show off that wasn't in Greater Germany itself. The city had been flattened by the blitzkreig and after they subdued the Soviets Speer had been let loose to do what he pleased with plenty of warm bodies from the labor battalions. The result was meant to have been a model town, something to impress the hell out of the rest of the world.

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It looked like another fascist wasteland to me. Wide boulevards leading to enormous squares dotted with ugly statues, the buildings those monolithic blocks they were so fond of, the whole designed to make the individual feel like nothing.

The streets were nearly empty as we drove toward the hall. A few figures walking quickly, hunched into themselves as if not to draw any more attention than they had to. Guards in front of some buildings, dressed in demented mutations of the Wehrmacht uniform, the coal-scuttle helmets chromed and polished to a high gloss. And everywhere the red-and-black banners flapping in the breeze.

They sure as hell squeezed the life out of this burg, I thought as we passed another monstrous building. I turned to look at it, almost able to hear the jackboots echoing in the corridors. There was a statue in front, a winged horse carrying a man with a bushy mustache, smoking a cigar. I recognized him, that ace of theirs from the war who'd ended up running the Luftwaffe.

We didn't get much of a welcome. No food at the hotel, not that we were hungry. Hoth had shown up promptly at six to chase us down to the cars, barking at us as if we were raw recruits.

I hadn't seen Reynolds or talked to D'Alessio since we'd landed. There was no phone in the suite.

I shifted my attention back to the car. Gooch was leaning over to whisper to Mos. "You sure you wanna go through with it? This don't look like the kind of place to pull a John Wayne, man."

"Why John Wayne?" Mos said in nearly a normal tone. "The Duke can't sing."

Smiling, Gooch shrugged. "Hell, they had to get Fabian to sing in that one flick of his," Mos went on. "You can't get worse than that."

A wave of laughter ran through the guys, and I smiled myself, even though I was having second thoughts, too. I looked back out the window. There was the hall, at the other end of a big square, looking like a swollen mausoleum. We passed a statue of a guy in a smock and beret being carried toward heaven by a gang of husky-looking women. Wagner, I supposed.

I saw with relief that there was no mob in front of the hall, only a few people making their way in. A minute later we were at the stage entrance and the car stopped.

A clot of men stood at the door, cop written all over them although they weren't in uniform. I noticed Plunkett in their midst, much better dressed than the last time I'd seen him. "Beer for the boys?" I said as I got out.

He smirked at me. "Not today, sir."

"Didn't think so," I said as I walked past him.

Shenk was just offstage, sitting on an amp case with a sour expression on his face. He brightened up as soon as he saw me, turning bleak again after I told him what we wanted. Then Mos came over, spoke to him for a minute and it was all right.

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I walked to the stage and took a look past the curtain. I'd told Mos we'd call it off if there were any kids out there.

"Jesus Christ." I took a step back. "Check this out," I said over my shoulder, expecting Mos to be there. He wasn't; instead Andy pushed past me to look out over the hall.

The first few rows were filled with uniforms. Brown shirts, armbands, some of them—at the end of each row, I noticed—with Sam Browne belts as well. The Jugend wearing them must have been young, though you couldn't tell it to look at them; they all had the standard white sidewall haircut and were sitting stiffly, as if waiting for orders. Ten rows of them, at least, each as alike as if they'd been turned out of a factory in the Ruhr on a rush order.

I turned to Andy. If I'd expected to see fear there I was wrong. He studied them, lip curled, then shook his head as if to dismiss them from vision. "Those bastards," he said. "Look at 'em. Oooh, stop, you're scaring me." He turned to me. "You know, Stevie, I thought you guys were kidding, but now . . . this shit's gotta end, man."

Holding the neck of the bass, he walked over to Gooch to fill him in on his outrage. I went past them to see if I could find Reynolds. I'd counted on him being here, but he was nowhere in sight. It'd be real cute if they didn't let him in. . . .

Looking down the corridor I caught sight of Hoth, wearing his hardass leather coat. He was talking to Mos, shaking his finger to make his points quite clear. Mos nodded back earnestly, a look on his face that'd fool your mother: what, *us?* We wouldn't do anything weird. We're a *pop* group.

A voice sounded from the speakers in guttural German. I slung the Gibson over my shoulders and picked out an arpeggio: in tune. Turning, I saw the band lined up, Mos, Andy, Gooch, and Ray. I nodded to them. Then the curtain rose and we walked onstage.

We stepped into near silence: no applause, a catcall or two. I plugged in and turned to the hall. The Jugend were staring at us blankly, as if they hadn't quite figured out what to do with us yet but were working on it. With the lights placed as they were I couldn't see the rest of the crowd; it seemed that the whole place was filled with them.

I put a foot on the amp and looked at Gooch. He raised a drumstick and jerked his head. How did that old Roman thing go? "We who are about to die. . . ."

Mos stepped to the mike. "Like you to know how happy we are to be in the Reich tonight," he said.

Dead silence. Mos nodded and raised his arm.

He dropped it and we gave it all we had, one monster note, roaring over the hall as if to blast the place apart. Then into the standard opener, played fast; we had no idea how much time they'd give us.

On through the hits: "Into the Night," "Redline," "Late Call" one after the other, no pauses between them. I was playing hard, machine-gunning the notes, going for force rather than finesse. For the first few minutes I

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stayed back near the amps, but as the music caught me I made for the edge of the stage and began to goad them, pointing the guitar neck at them, flailing my arm, making them see: this is free man's music, puppets, how do you like it?

For a few minutes I concentrated on one blond goof in the third row, big, dumb-looking, hair shaven nearly to his scalp. He didn't quite catch it at first but then he saw me looking at him and jumped in his seat. He reddened as everybody around him noticed what was going on, the cords in his bull neck standing out, his mouth working furiously. Finally he started shouting, his curses unheard over the music. I gave him one last chord, then danced to another part of the stage. He was getting up as I did, hands reaching to pull him back down.

But that was nothing compared to what Mos was doing. If it had taken me some time to get the attention of that one punk, it was because he'd been fixed on Mos. Everybody in that hall was.

As far as I could see he hadn't moved at all since he'd spoken those first lines. He stood there feet spread wide, occasionally putting a fist on his hip, but that was all: no leaps, no swinging the mike, no rushes across the stage.

But I'd never seen him hold an audience better than he did that night.

We finished "Manhattan" and he half-turned to me, his face stony. I nodded, and we went into the next set, the special set, for Amsterdam only.

First was Dylan, "Subterranean Homesick Blues," a little bit of confusion in case they were monitoring the songs. It went easy—the song was no more than a fast Berry-style shuffle, after all—and we roared through it smooth as silk, just as if it were "Carol" or "Johnny B. Goode," Mos spitting out the lyrics as if he'd written them. If they were translating any of that into German, I wished 'em luck.

There was some yelling from the front rows, but nothing more. That'd change soon enough. I hit the last notes and immediately went into the intro of the next song. The guys came in right behind me, a little ragged—after all, we hadn't rehearsed it. But that didn't matter.

Mos started singing, his voice rolling slow and certain, deep out of his chest. I glanced over at him. He hadn't moved an inch, was still standing as he'd been, head thrown back, ready for anything they'd throw at him.

There was no reaction until the chorus, then one alert little Nazi in an aisle seat perked up, mouth gaping wide, and ran across the aisle for a quick conference with another ubermensch. He glanced once more at the stage and went racing off to the rear. The rest started working their way up and down the aisles to give the word to their kameraden.

I turned to Mos. He was on the second chorus now, roaring it out like an accusation.

"Chimes of Freedom," one of old Bob's early ones, not too well known, not covered much, not one of the first songs you'd ever think of, but *now*, especially with its lyric about "rebels crucified upon the crooked cross" . . . now it meant everything.

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I heard a shout from offstage and looked over to see Hoth trying to get at the power switch, just out of sight past the curtain. He wasn't doing too well. His problem was that Willy and the rest of the crew were standing in front of it, not eager to let him past. They had a bunch of amp cases piled up and were clumped behind them draped with wrenches, hammers, and various other heavy tools they'd happened to pick up. Willy had his foot propped on a case and was staring down at Hoth with his arms crossed so that his tattoos were displayed nicely. Willy had once been a biker. I didn't know about the rest of the crew, but I had my suspicions.

As I watched Shenk came up behind Hoth and grabbed his arm. Swinging him around, he started bellowing. I couldn't hear it above the amps but I didn't have to.

Some figures appeared at the end of the ramp. Here we go, I thought: uniforms. Things were going to be wrapped up real quick. But I was only half-right: as they came into the light I saw that only a handful of them were the gorillas who'd been outside the stage door. The cops were there, all right, but in the midst of them, pushing and yelling, were D'Alessio, Reynolds, and the film crew. D'Alessio raced up to Hoth to add his voice to Shenk's. Reynolds and the others ran past and started filming everything in sight.

I turned away, grinning. This was working out better than I'd ever thought possible.

The Jugend had all gotten up and were spilling into the aisles, the ones wearing Sam Brownes directing and exhorting the others. I could see they were splitting up into groups; they'd planned this all right. As they lined up, shouting at the stage, I felt a touch of fear and backed off in spite of myself. But then one of the leaders caught sight of Reynolds' cameras and shouted at the others. They conferred for a minute and a clot of them ran toward the rear, where authority was presumably pondering things.

The song ended and I went through a quick flurry of notes ending with a power chord. Then another, then another, and another on top of that, the riff slowly building up. The band came in, first Gooch, then Andy, then Ray's goddamn synthesizer. Mos started singing. It was the last, best piece of defiance we could throw at them, a song by one who'd escaped them.

It was the climax from "Tommy," the part right at the end, where the kid leads his people to confront their Nazi masters.

I flailed away, no pick, smashing my fist across the strings, tearing my hands up but who cared. The rest of the band did the same. We'd never played the song before, it wasn't our style, but it worked. It was sloppy, it was ragged, it was right.

Out in front was sheer chaos. Those closest to us were shaking their fists and cursing, their mouths distorted, their faces red. Farther back the leaders were arguing, yelling at each other, waving their arms at

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the stage. Out on the left a group of them were singing, trying to drown us out. I thought I heard the words "Horst Wessel" but I can't be sure.

They could have had us in a minute, hit that stage and rolled over us like they'd rolled over everything else in their path, but they couldn't do it, couldn't make that move. They'd been regimented too long, stamped down and twisted since birth. It was like an attack dog being restrained by its master; sheer viciousness held in check by a word. They wanted us, they wanted us bad, but they needed the order.

The guards started moving in. Evidently someone had decided that things had gone too far. They tore into the mob, pushing and shoving their way through. Something rose from the rear row and landed next to Mos: a boot, black and well-shined. Mos had stopped singing a minute ago and was gazing out over them, smiling. Slowly he turned his back on them and walked offstage.

The lights went off—someone had gone down to the main bank. I flicked my thumb across the strings and discovered they hadn't cut the sound system.

You can't leave 'em calling for more. I went to my boxes and cranked up the sustain and fuzz, and then, not to copy Jimi too closely, started into "Battle Hymn of the Republic." As the drums thundered a martial beat behind me I turned to make out Gooch in the darkness.

I nodded to myself. You and me, Gooch. The last men on the ramparts.

I'd gotten to the chorus when the sound went. In front of me somebody clambered onstage; I moved back but it was just a guard, looking pretty battered—no hat, uniform in disarray. He glared at me, then turned to shout at the mob. The curtain started to close and Gooch got up and shot his sticks out over our audience.

Somebody grabbed me by the arm. Reynolds, his camera on one shoulder. "Come on, Webb, let's get out of here." He pulled me to the ramp, muttering, "You fucking maniacs." There was a wild grin on his face.

Shenk, Willy and the crew were clustered at the corridor entrance, exchanging jovial remarks with a group of gestap. I looked around for the band, saw them by the door to the dressing room corridor, laughing, hitting each other and generally acting like fools. For a second I couldn't find Mos, then I saw the blond, Lily, standing at the exit door, wearing a leather coat. Mos was walking toward her, easy and slow. I was going to yell to him when I heard a bitter voice and turned to see Hoth in the darkness by the stage ramp. His hair was a mess, slick strands hanging over his forehead, and his eyes were wide and glassy. He was cursing to himself over and over in German. As he noticed me watching he shut up, his eyes narrowing.

"Come on, let's get 'em together and go," Reynolds said. I called to the band and we moved out. The crew followed, saying their farewells to Hoth and the cops.

There was a lot of noise toward the front of the hall, but nobody outside. The car was there but no driver. Willy climbed in, found the keys in the ignition and started her up, saying he expected a little extra in his check

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for this. We piled inside, crew and band both. It was pretty crowded, particularly since I still had the Gibson slung around my neck.

"I feel bad," Gooch said as we drove off. "We oughtta go back and give 'em an encore."

The rest of them agreed, and we argued about it for a few blocks. "Fuck Webb," Andy said finally. "We'll ask Mos. He'll go for it."

"Where is Mos?" I said.

Nobody answered. "Did anybody see him?"

Ray leaned over from the front seat where he was crushed in between Willy and another one of Shenk's boys. "He's probably in that other car, you know, the film crew's."

I turned to look out the back window, a tricky operation with the guitar in my lap. There were no headlights behind us. I settled back into the seat. "Maybe," I said.

I didn't say much else until we got back to the hotel.

I sent them all upstairs with instructions to lock up and not let anybody in unless they IDed themselves as American. They went, yelling to each other, in high spirits. I stood outside a few feet from the entrance, still wet from the show, shivering a bit in the cool wind.

A few minutes later Reynolds pulled up. The window lowered and he poked his head out. "Just checking to see you made it okay. . . ." he began.

I leaned closer. "Mos didn't ride with you?"

"No." He stared at me, face frozen. "He wasn't with you?"

I straightened up and gazed at the cold sky. "Oh, Christ."

"Hang on," Reynolds said. He spoke for a minute with the rest of his team and turned back to me. "We're gonna call Dee," he said. He looked past me at the hotel entrance. "This place will be crawling with Gestapo in another two minutes."

I nodded. I'd been thinking the same myself. Reaching to the back seat, Reynolds unlocked the door. "Get in," he said.

We drove to a phone booth—not many in that town—and Reynolds got out to make a call. A German in a black uniform with silver flashing rode by on horseback, looking us over with interest. The other guys in the car—a skinny kid with glasses and an older guy who looked like a miniature Reynolds—stared back stonily.

Reynolds got in and we pulled away. "Dee's gonna call around, raise a little hell. We've got some assets at work, too. Call back in fifteen."

We drove aimlessly for a quarter of an hour and stopped at another phone—Reynolds seemed to know where they were. D'Alessio had no word so we circled around some more.

We repeated the process two or three times. I sat in the back seat looking out at the dark streets, trying not to think.

Reynolds said nothing as he got in after the last call. I pushed myself forward in the seat. "He say anything?"

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"Yeah," Reynolds said. The silence before his next words seemed to stretch for a long time. "He's at the hospital."

I sank back. "Oh, boy," the kid in glasses said. He threw his arm over the seat and turned to me. "You know, Webb, that was a real bright move . . ."

"Shut up, Alex," Reynolds said. Alex looked over at him and shrugged. We drove in silence the rest of the way.

It took us twenty minutes to get to the hospital, a shabby building in the Dutch quarter. No doubt they had something a lot better elsewhere, but they wouldn't be accepting foreigners there.

Reynolds slowed down as he turned onto the street, stopping a half block short of the hospital. Looking out the windshield I could see why: there was a line of official-looking cars parked in front, a lot of people milling around, some in uniform and some not. They seemed agitated; they were speaking loudly and looking toward the hospital entrance.

Reynolds got out, followed by the guy sitting next to me. "Stay here," he said as he closed the door.

I looked out at him for a second. "No way, man," I muttered. I started to open the door but there was a sudden flurry of sound from the hospital: shouts, commands, and laughter.

They were dragging somebody down the steps, not being too gentle about it. It took me a moment to realize who it was: D'Alessio, two big guys on either side holding his arms. He was shouting at them but they were paying no attention.

Behind them another pair appeared, half-carrying D'Alessio's assistant, minus his briefcase. He was taking it philosophically, not struggling or saying a word.

"Son of a bitch," Reynolds said. He snapped his fingers at his partner. "Camera."

Alex got out as the other guy ran back to the trunk. A second later he reappeared carrying two cameras, handing one to Alex and hoisting the other onto his shoulder. "Not much light," Alex said. "And we may be out of range."

"Do it for effect," Reynolds called back as he ran toward the hospital, his partner right behind him.

The Nazis had dumped D'Alessio and his assistant on the sidewalk and were gathering around. A short, fat one swaggered up to them and started to chew them out in a high-pitched voice. D'Alessio was hollering back when Reynolds ran up. A few of the Nazis turned and looked them over, then one stepped to Reynolds' partner and knocked the camera off his shoulder.

"Holy shit," I heard Alex say. I'd gotten out of the car and was studying the hospital. There was an alleyway a few yards ahead that seemed to lead to the back of the building. I didn't know how European hospitals were set up, but they must have some kind of rear entrance.

I glanced up the street. The Nazis were all having fun at the expense

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of the OCI and weren't looking in this direction. Alex had taken a few steps closer to the action and was bent over staring fixedly through the viewfinder.

I didn't wait. Keeping close to the building fronts I ran toward that alley. Alex called to me as I reached it but I didn't answer.

There were no lights and I slowed down to make sure I didn't stumble over anything. At the end I stopped and looked around the corner. It was a parking area with one truck that could have been an ambulance sitting rear-on to a concrete ramp. Behind it stood the blond, gazing off into darkness. She turned to me as I approached, and I knew that Mos was dead.

She said something as I ran past her through the swinging doors. Inside it was bright and for a moment I couldn't make out anything. Then I saw him, lying on a gurney in the corner of the room.

I went over slowly, not knowing if anyone else was there. One arm was dangling, his fingers inches from the floor. The other was broken, bone showing through the skin. His shirt, the peasant shirt he'd worn only on stage, was soaked with blood.

I lifted the arm and placed it on his chest, then bent closer. They hadn't done much to his face; there was blood on one side from his scalp but that was all. His hair was matted and clumped with red, turning dark as it started to dry. On one side of his head was a soft spot that I could have laid my palm in. The woman spoke but I did not turn. His eyes were half open, glassy, dead. They hadn't even had the decency to close them. And I thought of the millions of other eyes that had not been closed either, and reached up and shut his.

"I did not know that they meant to. . . ."

I lifted my hands and leaned against the gurney, wishing that she would die on the spot, or leave, or just vanish.

"I thought they wanted to frighten him."

No, I told myself. Find your own forgiveness. I will give you nothing.

I straightened up and turned to her. She was holding a handkerchief, twisting it, nails buried in her palms. Her eyes were slits, her lips parted and teeth gritted as if to stop a keening sound from escaping them. She stared at me in silence, as if I was her judge, as if her punishment was coming this minute.

There was a sound from the doorway at the end of the room: footsteps, distant but coming closer. She looked over, her face clearing instantly. "You must go," she said. "At once."

I said nothing and made no move. "You must leave now." Her voice was a harsh whisper. She pointed past me to the gurney. "Do you want that?"

So I left my friend to them, and went out into the darkness.

It had grown colder—at least it felt that way. I walked slowly toward the street, no longer caring who saw me. I was nearly there when I heard a revving of car engines and emerged to see Reynolds leaving with two of their cars escorting him at front and rear.

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The street was empty. I stood there a few minutes, looking around me, then started walking.

My mind was clear, as clear as it had ever been, but barren of everything but the necessity of forgetting what I'd seen for a time. It seemed then that it couldn't have happened, not this way, and that Mos, the Mos of my school days, the Mos of the early hustles, the Mos of the road, the Mos of all my years would run up behind me and tell me that it was a game, just a game, that he liked to see me jump.

I almost heard him say it.

I walked next to the river for awhile. There was a half-moon in the sky and I stared at it, uncomprehending, until I recalled what was up there, the sons of the Reich in peril. Let them die, I said to myself. Let them choke in their corridors.

But no—there was a vessel of my people on its way there. That was better. They should grovel. They should be forced to thank us.

I suppose there were plenty of patrols out that night but I didn't come across them or didn't see them if I did. Not until dawn, with the sky lightening in the east, did a man on horseback wearing a joke uniform catch sight of me. He followed me for nearly fifty yards, barking "Halte!", finally hitting me on the shoulder with a riding crop. I turned and looked up at him. He glared for a moment, flourishing his stick, then dropped his eyes and confusedly took out a hand radio.

I walked on, leaving him shouting behind me. A few minutes later a car pulled up. The door opened and Hoth emerged. He swept a hand at me and said, "Get in."

I waited a second then did as he told me. He had muscle in the car, two of them aside from the driver, one in the back seat next to the far door. I sat down and Hoth got in after me.

I could feel him staring but I didn't look back. I was feeling a small gout of fear, thinking perhaps that he'd found out I'd been at the hospital. I ignored it.

After a few minutes he said, "So, our guest musician decided to take a stroll." I didn't bother to answer. "Tell me," he went on. "What makes a man wish to perform nigger music? You don't look like you have much nigger in you."

He suddenly reached over and grabbed my earring. I pulled away, leaning into the bruiser beside me.

"Or is it this, eh?" Hoth made a sound of disgust. "What do they call it in America? Faggotry? Is that it?"

I actually felt better. If they were going to do a job on me, he wouldn't have bothered with petty stuff like that.

"A fine thing—an American degenerate, playing minstrel tunes, and we're required to entertain him. . . ."

He went on like that for awhile, stopping when I gave him no sign that I'd heard. The car pulled around a large building with no statues or indication of what it could be and headed to the rear. A Gestapo building, no doubt.

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They marched me inside and down a corridor to a small room. There was a table with a chair in front of it. One of the hitters shoved me into the chair.

Hoth walked around the table and thrust a sheet of paper across the top, then took a pen out of his pocket and tossed it toward me. "You will sign that and you will leave. It states that you are aware that Mosley suffered an accident. If you refuse, there are plenty of men," he put an emphasis on the word, "in this building who will be more than willing to tear that earring out."

I picked up the sheet and read through it. It was what he said, no more and no less. I put it back on the table. "Where is the band?"

Hoth smiled down at me for a moment before answering. "They are at the aerodrome, awaiting the next flight. It leaves in half an hour. If you miss it, another may not take off for some time. Sign the statement."

He struck a pose, leaning on one arm with the other on his hip. I looked away, trying to keep from laughing. He couldn't possibly be gestap himself; he was too goddamn silly. A glance at the muscle by the door confirmed it: he was staring at Hoth, his mouth twisted sourly.

I looked at the sheet for a few seconds. "And what about the film crew?"

"Ah, worried about them as well, are you? Perhaps we should look into your relations with the Company a bit more deeply."

He put his hands into his pockets and paced to the other end of the table. Oh, come off it, I thought.

"Expelled," he said. "Along with that 'attaché.' They'll be on the same flight. You can discuss matters with them all you like then." He swung around, trying for drama, tapping his fist twice on the sheet. "Sign."

It was the bit about Reynolds' crew that decided me. Oh, if I'd held out they probably would have broken down, but I thought it was a nice touch to let them think they had something.

I picked up the pen and signed.

It took only a few minutes to get to the airport. As we went through the terminal Hoth lectured me on how to walk out to the plane: apparently they had a camera crew there. Move slowly, look solemn, shake his hand before I got on board.

We stopped at the exit door, beneath the twisted cross. The plane was a hundred yards away, a Columbia Airlines 714. I tried to make out if anybody was in the windows but couldn't.

Hoth was eyeing me. "Remember," he said. "We have the statement." He turned to walk through the door.

I followed him, two gestap right behind me. It was windy out there, and my hair blew into my eyes. I took it slow, keeping my face straight, watching the plane. A guard stood at the top of the steps, in front of the open hatch.

We were a quarter of the way there before anybody looked out, then Gooch's face appeared at one of the windows. He vanished, reappearing a moment later along with everybody else. I glanced across the rest of the windows, looking for Reynolds. There he was, above the wing. I bit

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my lip, wishing I could signal him, and just then he backed off and the snout of a camera appeared.

Smokin', I thought, and came to a halt. Hoth went on a few steps before realizing that I was no longer beside him. He turned, a look of fury on his face. As he came toward me I thought of Mos, and Europe, and that nameless town far to the east. Then I drove my knee into his crotch with all the strength I had.

He fell to the concrete, mouth gaping, legs drawn up. A second later I was struck from behind and dropped to my knees. I tried to scramble away but a boot caught me in the ribs and I went over. Another, full in the spine. I put my hands up to protect my face, and the last thing I saw before I blacked out was the guard tumbling down the steps and Gooch, Willy, and everybody else leaping to the concrete, headed my way.

I came to aboard the plane, blinking about me, confused images of the morning racing through my mind. There were footsteps and a face appeared, blond and blue-eyed. I jerked away as the woman raised her hand but relaxed as she began speaking in the soft tones of the deep south. "Hey, now, it's okay. You're goin' home."

I grunted an answer when she asked how I was feeling and looked around. I was sitting in what looked like the first-class compartment, the seat dropped back as far as it would go. When I tried to sit up a lash of pain struck me and she gently pushed me back. "Take it easy, hon. They racked you up some."

As she went to the cabin door I looked myself over. There was a thick layer of surgical tape around my lower ribs, a bandage on my cheekbone, on the left side of my face under the eye. My elbows were badly scraped with some kind of sickly-smelling lotion on them, and there was a large welt at the back of my head.

Somebody had put a western shirt on me, the tails left out and only a few of the buttons snapped. It was several sizes too large and I thought I recognized it as one of Gooch's. I was barefoot, though my boots had been put under the seat in front of me.

The door opened. I forced myself up, expecting Mos to come in, but then memory returned and with it a wave of desolation. He was still back there, in their hands. The thought was unbearable.

The flight attendant said something and I turned to see her talking to Reynolds. Something struck me about him as odd, then I realized what it was: he wasn't wearing the safari jacket. He looked battered, bandages here and there, but nowhere near as bad as I was.

He glanced over at me, then spoke to the attendant. ". . . be okay," I heard him say. She nodded and closed the door, and Reynolds came over to me.

"How you feeling?" he said as he sat on the armrest across the aisle from me.

"Like shit," I said.

He gave a gentle laugh. "Yeah. They worked you over pretty good

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before the gang got to you. No permanent damage, though. Burgh fixed things up for the moment—Dee's man, used to be an army medic."

"Anybody else get hurt?"

"You kidding? They hit those Krauts like Patton hit Kwantung. Had trouble stopping them from taking the terminal. Nazis sent out some airport guards, but we were back aboard by then. They cleared us for takeoff ten minutes later. Wanted no part of it."

"You get it all on film?"

He nodded, smiling broadly. I studied him for a moment. "How did you know?"

"Something told me you wouldn't let it lie, kiddo."

I nodded and turned my head away. I thought of telling him about the statement, but that could wait. They'd never use it now.

When I looked back up his face had grown sober. "This won't help," he said quietly, "but it looks like that gang is going to be purged. Von Marck's office called the Berlin embassy today condemning their actions."

I dropped my head, not trusting myself to speak.

Reynolds got up and leaned over the seat behind me. When he reappeared he was holding a film cartridge, the big kind that the pros use. "They confiscated all your tapes," he said as he handed it to me. "But that's everything, including Amsterdam. Sound quality's pretty bad, but maybe you can use it."

I hefted it in my hand. We'd use it, all right, bad sound or not. There'd even be a swastika on the cover: a burning rag, or one of their stone-cold eagles smashed to fragments. We'd think of something.

"We will," I told him, my voice starting to break. "Goddamn right."

"Good," he said. He cocked his head toward the back. "The rest of them want to talk to you but it can wait."

I nodded, not looking up at him. He patted me on the shoulder and went down the aisle.

"Frank," I called out as he reached the door.

"Yeah?"

I turned toward him, no longer trying to hide my grief. "He's still there. They've still got him."

Reynolds was standing with his hand on the doorlatch. "Not for long," he said, his voice soft. "We wouldn't leave him there, Steve. He was a patriot."

He left, and I settled back into the seat. I started laughing to myself, as Mos would have laughed. Jake Mosley, a *patriot?* Mosley the rebel, Mosley the bad boy, Mosley the rock 'n' roll king . . . ?

But maybe he *was*, I thought as the laughter started to turn into something else, as I looked at the cartridge that was all I had left. Maybe he was.

God damn anybody who isn't. ●

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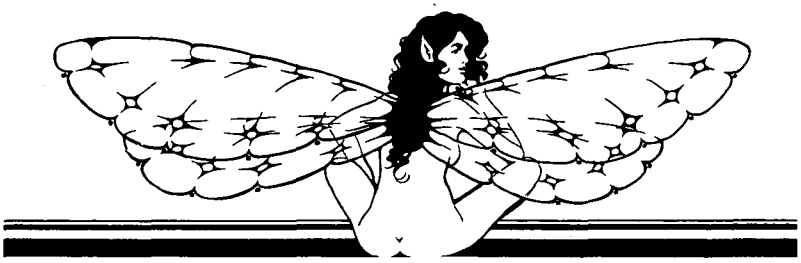

NEXT ISSUE

Our November issue is a very special issue indeed, for several reasons. For one thing, it's our official relaunch issue, the first to be officially published under the auspices of our new publishers, Dell Magazines, and, in honor of the occasion, we have redesigned the cover and come up with a brand-new cover logo, to mark the transition from one Era of the magazine to what we hope will be the start of an exciting *new* Age, one that we expect will continue long into the unforeseeable future. For another thing, it's our special Tribute issue to the late Isaac Asimov, a chance for his friends and colleagues to say goodbye to Isaac in the pages of the magazine that he founded and that bears his name. We'll be featuring memorial Tributes to Isaac and personal reminiscences *of* Isaac—some of them moving, some of them really quite funny—by people such as Arthur C. Clarke, Harlan Ellison, Carl Sagan, Connie Willis, L. Sprague de Camp, Catherine Crook de Camp, Norman Spinrad, Frederik Pohl, Ben Bova, Poul Anderson, Karen Anderson, Shawna McCarthy, and others. The November issue will also feature a new story by **Isaac Asimov** himself, "The Critic on the Hearth," one of the last of the George and Azazel stories, and one of the funniest in the whole long-running series, as George and Azazel square off against the dreaded Critical Establishment itself—which, of course, turns out to be no match for them at *all*. We've especially commissioned a cover by **Michael Whelan** for this most special of special issues, a brand-new painting by the man who's won more Hugo Awards than any other artist during the last couple of decades, a painting that serves as Whelan's *own* tribute to Isaac and his work.

And is that all? No, not even close. Because November is *also* one of our special Double-Length issues, and *that* means that after we have paid our respects to Isaac, we have plenty of room left to

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then bring you some of the best science fiction available on the market today, stories by both the Biggest of Big Names and by rising young stars—which, of course, is how Isaac himself would have wanted it to be.

Many of Isaac's closest colleagues are also on hand with fiction in our jam-packed November issue. For instance, Hugo- and Nebula-winner **Frederik Pohl,** a seminal figure whose career spans almost the entire development of modern science fiction, is on hand with our lead story, a big new novella called "Outnumbering the Dead," which may well be one of the best pieces Pohl has ever produced in his long and distinguished career—a wise, funny, madly inventive, and ultimately quite moving look at what it's like to be the ultimate Have-Not in a high-tech future society composed almost entirely of *Haves*.... Another seminal Giant of the form, **L. Sprague de Camp,** who celebrated his fifty-fifth anniversary as a writer in these pages in September, returns in November with another of his marvelous Reginald Rivers stories, this one detailing the comic chaos that ensues when Reggie takes a bunch of hardline Creationists back to prehistoric times for a firsthand look at what they insist on calling "The Satanic Illusion." And bestselling author **Ben Bova**—former editor of *Analog* and *Omni*—is also on board for November, taking us into Deep Space to unravel a strange and dangerous Mystery, in the exciting "Sepulcher."

ALSO IN NOVEMBER: popular new writer **R. Garcia y Robertson** takes us on a wild chase through time, from the witch-burning days of the Inquisition in Europe to the darkest days of World War II inside the crumbling Reich itself, in "Gypsy Trade," an immensely entertaining novella that moves like a runaway train; one of our most popular writers, **Alexander Jablokov,** gives us a vivid, bittersweet look at what it's like to be a young girl growing up on a mysterious frontier planet, in the compelling "Above Ancient Seas"; hot new writer **Kathe Koja** returns with a hot new version of a very old legend, in "Persephone"; critically acclaimed writer **A.A. Attanasio** makes an impressive *IAsfm* debut with some evocative letters from a very strange New World, all written in "Ink from the New Moon"; **Robert Reed** takes us back to the '50s—sort of—along with an extremely odd cast of characters who are all deeply embroiled in the intricacies of "Burger Love"; **Esther M. Friesner** returns with a tale that's a distinct change of pace from her usual Funny Stuff, the haunting and *very* powerful story of the hardships that sometimes must be faced if you want to live up to "All Vows"; **Melanie Tem,** one of the hardest-hitting writers in the business, returns to follow "A Trail of Crumbs" to a very unsettling destination, one that's a lot easier to get in to than it is to get *out* of again; and **Larry Tritten** takes an extremely funny, wry, and satiric look at that epic bestseller "The Lord of the Land Beyond (Part One)."

PLUS our usual array of columns and features! So be sure to look for our immense and history-making *very* special November Double Issue, on sale on your newsstands on September 15, 1992.

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ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

In Ana On the Kawa

Exile

By Michael P. Kube-McDowell
Ace, $17.95

Well, to begin with a cliché I'm still fond of, the good news is that in *Exile,* Michael Kube-McDowell tells a good story with some style and intelligence. The bad news is that it's a story that's been told before, and the style and intelligence sometimes work against it.

Meer Fastet lives in an convoluted and structured society which seems confined to one large city built (in concentric rings, obviously to some sort of plan) on the banks of a large river. The city is Ana, the river is Kawa, and they are more or less the deities of this culture, which can be characterized as vaguely Sino-Egyptian. The Egyptian flavor comes from the dusty city built in a desert on a river, the Chinese factor is in certain aspects of the city's sociological makeup, too complex to go into here.

Ah, but they have certain technological artifacts, which are becoming harder and harder to repair and which few, if any, of the city's workmen and thinkers really understand. That is the probable giveaway to the experienced reader that what we are dealing with is a human colony on an alien planet which has forgotten its origins.

Meer is a sort of around town handyman, with tasks assigned by the civic government. In the course of his duties, he meets a member of the intelligentsia who encourages his (and others') questioning of the setup.

When a light in the sky appears and a new "voice of Ana" (rather than that of Ana giving municipal news) says that their brethren have come from far away to tell them of their origins, the invested powers slaughter those who have gathered to hear more in the public square (in a situation very similar to recent events in China) and expel the leaders who escape the massacre. Meer informs on his teacher, who with others is exiled into the wilderness. There are rumors of an outcasts's settlement downriver, and years later Meer is contacted and asked to go there to bring his dying teacher "home." This, of course, brings about a *crise de conscience*, a trip of discovery (interior and exterior), and eventually a cleansing of Ana and a beginning to learn the reality of the world.

There's nothing in *Exile* that is badly done, but one wishes that Kube-McDowell had chosen to tell his story chronologically instead of

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hopping back and forth from Meer's youth to his much later moment of truth; there seems no reason for mixing the chronology of the story. Also, I admire the ability to write such paragraphs as: ". . . the dan are the memory of Ana. You are her everyday conscience, and your tongues speak her true voice. Your power is the counterpoint to the power of the high bank, and its equal. Your weight on the rope, whichever end you choose, can settle which way the players fall." But a little bit of that goes a long way, and I'm afraid too many of the author's characters tend to fall into such utterance.

In Morrow Veritas

City of Truth
By James Morrow
St. Martin's, $14.95.

James Morrow's *City of Truth* takes place in a near future in a city called Veritas, where every citizen is forced at age ten through extremely painful conditioning into always telling the truth. This results in a culture in which products have names such as Mom's Middling Margarine, shops can be called Molly's Rather Expensive Toy Store, and one can have conversations with clerks therein in which you're told that you can get the same product for two dollars less elsewhere.

Following the pattern of the repressive future novel, there is, of course, an underground, the dissemblers, who can lie and even make up fiction and poetry. The hero, a critic whose job it is to eliminate early examples of cinematic untruth such as *Citizen Kane* and *It's A Wonderful Life* (hoorah!), wants to find and join the dissemblers, since his young son is dying from a fatal disease communicated by a rabbit bite, and he needs a miracle inspired by faith and belief in the unbelievable.

Morrow is walking the fine line between SF and satire here, and how you react to this fable depends on how realistic and/or convincing your SF needs be. But the ending is affecting on the human level and besides, it's probably worth the read just for the cited notice on a cigarette pack: WARNING: THE SURGEON GENERAL'S CRUSADE AGAINST THIS PRODUCT MAY DISTRACT YOU FROM THE MYRIAD WAYS YOUR GOVERNMENT FAILS TO PROTECT YOUR HEALTH.

Warrior Wizard

Greenmagic
By Crawford Kilian
Del Rey, $4.99 (paper)

Some time back (about a decade ago, I guess), I liked Crawford Kilian's first novel, *Eyas,* a lot. I liked his current novel, *Greenmagic*, too, but unfortunately not a lot, and that may be because it seemed all too close to *Eyas*. Mr. Kilian was one of those writers one expected to develop, to perhaps come out with a *magnum opus* eventually. Now I haven't read everything he's written, and I may have missed a *magnum opus* or two along the way, but *Greenmagic* ain't it. Again we have a magic world with odd links to Earth (here an implied immigration of peoples and animals rather arbitrarily brought about by powers—or gods if you will).

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And again we have strong characters and vividly described cultures, which is what I liked about the author's work back at the beginning. But this one, while not exactly repetitive, really breaks no new ground. A barbaric warrior people has pushed out a gentler folk from their homeland, enslaving most. A remnant has taken refuge in the mountains, with a culture vaguely like the native American; another small segment, magically knowledgeable, has descended to caverns underground, becoming near-legendary. Each race has strong magical powers, but the more sanguine Badakh sorcery has bested that of the gentler Cantareans.

The hero is (supposedly) the bastard son of a warlord of the conquering race by a Cantarean slave woman.

It's a setup, however; Dheribi's mother was already pregnant when she was raped and carried off by the warlord. But she has managed the difficult feat of enthralling him, and so her son is regarded as his, and brought up as a Badakh warrior prince. However, his mother teaches him Cantarean magic; he also learns Badakh magic (and is a whiz at both). The story is of his combination of the two (plus that of the legendary underground folk and a bit out of left field) to reshape the power structure of his world.

This moves right along, with enough invention to keep the reader interested if not all that surprised. But two thirds of the way through, what should come deus ex machining into the story but (sigh) a dragon; very wise and very magically perspicacious (of course).

Now I had a bit to say about dragons in the last column, and at this point, I'm ready to make a revolutionary suggestion. Could we have a moratorium on dragons for five years or so? I, for one, am sick to death of them, no matter how wise, magical, appealing, majestic or well-drawn they are. They're even prime time sitcom material now. Is there no one else out there who has had it with dragons? (Needless to say, this particular rap is hardly limited to Mr. Kilian; it's just that his dragon just seemed so damned gratuitous that it was a sort of last straw.)

Arthurian Envoi

The Last Pendragon

By Robert Rice
Walker, $19.95.

Do we need yet another Arthurian novel after the seeming thousands of the last decade? One would think not, and yet a good book is a good book, and yes, one needs an Arthurian novel when it's a *good* novel.

Robert Rice's *The Last Pendragon* is a good novel.

Its prologue deals with the final battle between Arthur and Mordred (here Medraut); the emphasis is laid on the betrayal of Arthur by Bedwyr in not casting the sword Caliburn into the mere. Instead he hides it in the trunk of an ancient tree.

The major portion of the novel takes place eleven years later. Rice has set his Arthurians, not in a never-never Camelot, but in a quite realistic historical setting (almost, but not quite, as veracious

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as that of Rosemary Sutcliff's *Sword At Sunset*). Here the enemy is the invading Saxons, with whom Medraut (also dead in battle) had allied himself. There are two major figures. Bedwyr is the last surviving companion. Over the years, he has made his living as a mercenary in the rapidly disintegrating Roman Empire in Europe, serving under Belisarius. Irion is the son of Medraut and is now a young man. Virtue has skipped a generation; Irion is like his grandfather in character as well as looks, but is distrusted because of his paternity by the remnants of the Arthurian forces.

Bedwyr, tormented by his betrayal of trust, must return to Britain. Though loathe to reinvolve himself in the matters of Britain, forces combine to compel him to reunite what's left of Arthur's people to withstand a final conquest of consolidation by the Saxons, as well as come to terms with Irion.

Rice has accomplished a small miracle here. Despite the realistic handling of the tale, it reverberates with the splendor and tragedy of the Arthurian epic. It is a postscript, an envoi, but one that is worthy of its predecessor, and though the specific fantasy elements are almost nil, their very absence seems to evoke the lost glamour, that ending which is the theme of the novel.

Shean Envoi

Sir Harold and the Gnome King
By L. Sprague de Camp
The Wildside Press (37 Fillmore St., Newark, NJ 07105), $5.99 (paper)

Long-time readers will know that I have relatively often had occasion to refer to the Harold Shea or "Incomplete Enchanter" stories by L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt. To explain yet once again, though not enshrined among the greatest classics of the Golden Age (the first was published in 1940), these stories are seminal to both contemporary fantasy and contemporary SF, particularly those that attempt a combination. They were ground breakers, in which a mild-mannered and rather ordinary contemporary American, by scientifically manipulating symbolic logic, was thrown into various worlds of fantasy. *Voilà!* Scientific *and* fantastic. They were also very funny, bouncing our hero off of Norse and Finnish myth, *Orlando Furioso*, and other fantasy milieux.

Now de Camp has given us a final Shea story (Pratt died in 1956, too young): *Sir Harold and the Gnome King*. No fan of the Oz books needs to be told the major locale of this short Shea *envoi*; no fan of the Shea books need to be told it's a necessary acquisition. (Icing on the cake—the cover is by George Barr, but is to perfection in the style of Edd Cartier, the great Golden Age illustrator of *Unknown* and *Astounding* [now *Analog*]. Ozma by Cartier—what more could one wish?)

Merrittorious

Dwellers In the Mirage
By A. Merritt
Collier, $5.95 (paper)

Yes, I know. *Dwellers In the Mirage* is the third book by A. Merritt I've reviewed in a year. But give me a break. The works of the greatest American writer of fantasy be-

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tween the two world wars are finally being reprinted after being shamefully unavailable for years; they deserve all the promulgation they can get, considering the woeful ignorance of the reading public of anything published before 1992. And I'll freely admit it's self indulgence—I love his stuff. But think of all the cra . . . er, less desirable material I have to read. Surely you can forgive.

"The Book of Khalk'ru," "The Book of the Mirage," "The Book of Evalie," "The Book of the Witch Woman," The Book of Dwayanu," and "The Book of Lief": these are the divisions of *Dwellers*. They must evoke magic, even to those who have never read Merritt. Khalk'ru—the destroyer, the Lightless Timeless Void, Universal Chaos to which life in an intrusion. It is represented by the twelve-tentacled Kraken, still worshipped by the Uighars of the Gobi, and something of it can be raised by ancient ritual to accept sacrifices—to annihilate humans given to it. The Mirage—a vast valley in the back of beyond in Alaska, which due to a thermal trick of glacial air and thermal activity, looks like a stony waste from above. But below that mirage is a jungled wilderness, full of wonders dating back to the Carboniferous Age and inhabited originally by the tiny humans known as the Yunwi Tsundi', the Little People, to the native Americans. It is later invaded by the Ayjir, the blond and red-headed splinter group (still worshipers of Khalk'ru) of those original natives of the Gobi region, the majority of which settled Scandinavia.

Evalie is the beautiful human foundling raised by the Little People of the Mirage. The Witch Woman is Lur, co-master of the surviving Ayjir of the Mirage, who leads a pack of white wolves. Dwayanu was an ancient war leader of the Ayjir, before they left their Asian homeland, whose atavistic memories live on in Lief Langdon, American explorer who stumbles (literally) into the mirage, which brings forth Dwayanu, upsets the age-old balance of forces there, and eventually goes against the evocation of Khalk'ru.

Merritt is known as a fantasist, but *Dwellers,* like the best of his other novels, is really science-fantasy with its roots in the lost race novel à la Haggard (which could be considered geographical/sociological SF—notice the Mongolian/Norse/native American mixture here). Every phenomenon is given some sort of scientific rationale, naïve to today's more sophisticated audience, but firmly based in science of the period. That which makes it all so special, though, is the lush romantic descriptions, the kind of prose that they literally don't write any more. Too lush for some people; evocatively beautiful for others. (Note—*Dwellers* has been published in the past with two different endings, one tragic, one happy. I won't say which this new edition is.)

Shoptalk

Anthologies, etc. . . . Can't not mention a new collection of stories by Kate Wilhelm, original publications of which range from *Omni* to *Redbook* (is that a range?). Title: *And the Angels Sing* (St. Martin's, $19.95). . . . Let's call your atten-

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tion to an interesting reprint, *The Best of Astounding: Classic Short Novels from the Golden Age of Science Fiction*. This book is based on the three volume set published by Easton Press last year. In point of fact, two of the six short novels had never before been anthologized, de Camp's "The Stolen Dormouse" and Anderson's "We Have Fed Our Sea." There's also an Asimov, a Leinster (see below), a Blish, and a Lovecraft. A Lovecraft! Yes, indeedy. He published in *Astounding* (now *Analog*) with "The Shadow Out of Time," a sensational mixture of SF and Lovecraftian prose (like so much of his output—"science fantasy" is probably the best term). (Carroll & Graf, $21).

Sequels, prequels, series, and whatnot... Charles de Lint has finally done a sequel to his popular *Moonheart* of 1984. It's called *Spiritwalk* (Tor, $19.95).

Reprints etc.... Murray Leinster might be considered a seminal figure of the "Golden Age," slightly antedating it but making some strong contributions to its concepts and its works. It's mighty good to see *Quarantine World* back in print. It consists of four novelettes about the Interplanetary Medical Service, arguably the first science fiction written about future medicine (Carroll & Graf, $3.95, paper).... And finally, there's John Brunner's *The Squares of the City*, a novel from 1965 which even then was not quite like anything else (Collier, $5.95, paper).

Recent publications from those associated with this magazine include: *The Mammoth Book of Fantastic Science Fiction (Short Novels of the 1970s)* edited by Isaac Asimov, Charles G. Waugh, and Martin H. Greenberg (Carroll & Graf, $9.95, paper).

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, 1393 Rue La Fontaine, Montréal, Québec, H2L1T6, Canada. ●

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

It's quiet in the US around WorldCon time, so here's a look further down the line than usual, into autumn. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 [business] envelope) at Box 3343, Fairfax VA 22038. The hot line is (703) 2SF-DAYS (273-3297). If a machine answers (with a list of the weekend's cons), leave a message and I'll call back on my nickel. When calling cons (early evening's good), give your name and reason for calling right off. Look for me with the Filthy Pierre badge.

AUGUST 1992

21-23—**TardisCon.** For info, write: **Box 1001, St. Ann MO 63044.** Or phone: **(314) 731-3040** (10 A.M. to 10 P.M., not collect). Con will be held in: St. Louis MO (if city omitted, same as in address) at the Henry VIII Inn. Guests will include: John (Sgt. Benton) Levine. Dr. Who con with "medieval/renaissance" slant.

28-31—**RecCon.** Picadilly Hotel, Manchester England. The national Star Trek convention of the UK.

SEPTEMBER 1992

3-7—**MagiCon. (407) 859-8421.** Peabody Hotel, Orlando FL. The World SF Con. $135 at the door.

4-6—**Czechoslovakia Nat'l. Con, Komarek, Umlekarny 12, 73701 Cesky Tesin, Czech.** Ostrova U.

4-6—**Gateway, Box 3849, Torrance CA 90510. (213) 326-9440.** Fantasy gaming meet near Los Angeles.

11-13—**CopperCon, Box 11743, Phoenix AZ 85061. (602) 220-9785.** Roger Zelazny, Alan Dean Foster.

11-13—**MosCon, Box 8521, Moscow ID 83843.** Their fourteenth annual affair, at the Best Western.

11-13—**ConTraption, 4 Haddon Close, New Malden KT3 6DP UK. E. Anglia, U., Norwich UK.**

12-13—**Operation Green Flag, % Foner, 200 3rd, New Cumberland PA 17070. (717) 774-6676.** Gaming.

18-20—**ConJunction, Box 203, Glenroy VIC 3046, Australia.** At the Sheraton, Melbourne Australia.

18-20—**ConQuest, Box 1376, Brisbane QLD 4001, Australia.** Gateway Hotel, N. Quay. Theme: Robots.

25-27—**ConTact, Box 3894, Evansville IN 47737. (812) 473-3109.** Ramada Inn. Ed. Kim Mohan.

25-27—**Star Trek Fest, 920 Trowbridge Rd #60, E. Lansing MI 48823.** Holiday Inn, John de Lancie.

26-27—**OrlandoCon, % Ivey, 561 Obispo Ave., Orlando FL 32807. (407) 273-0141.** Comics, comic art.

OCTOBER 1992

2-4—**ConText, Box 2954, Columbus OH 43216. (614) 889-0436.** M. H. Greenberg. Focus on written SF.

2-4—**ConTradiction, Box 2043, Newmarket Stn., Niagara Falls NY 14301.** Turtledove, Cherryh, Kress.

2-4—**RoVaCon, Box 117, Salem VA 24153. (703) 389-9400.** M. Z. Bradley, G. (Sulu) Takei, Clement.

SEPTEMBER 1993

2-6—**ConFrancisco, 712 Bancroft Rd. 1993, Walnut Creek CA 94598. (510) 945-1993.** WorldCon in SF.

SEPTEMBER 1994

1-5—**ConAdian, Box 2430, Winnipeg MB R3C 4A7. (204) 942-3427 (fax).** WorldCon. C$85/US$75.

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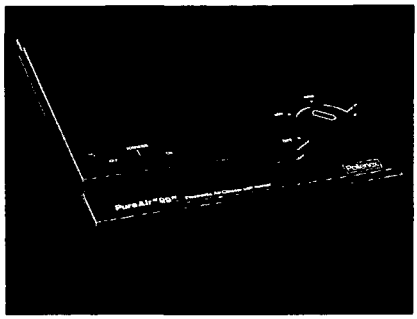

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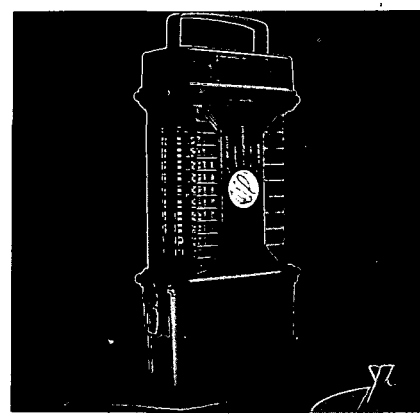

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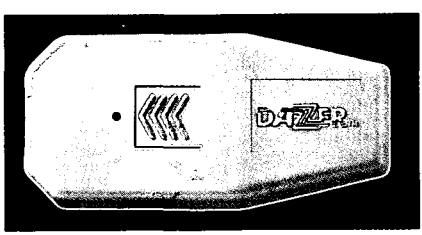

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